

# music

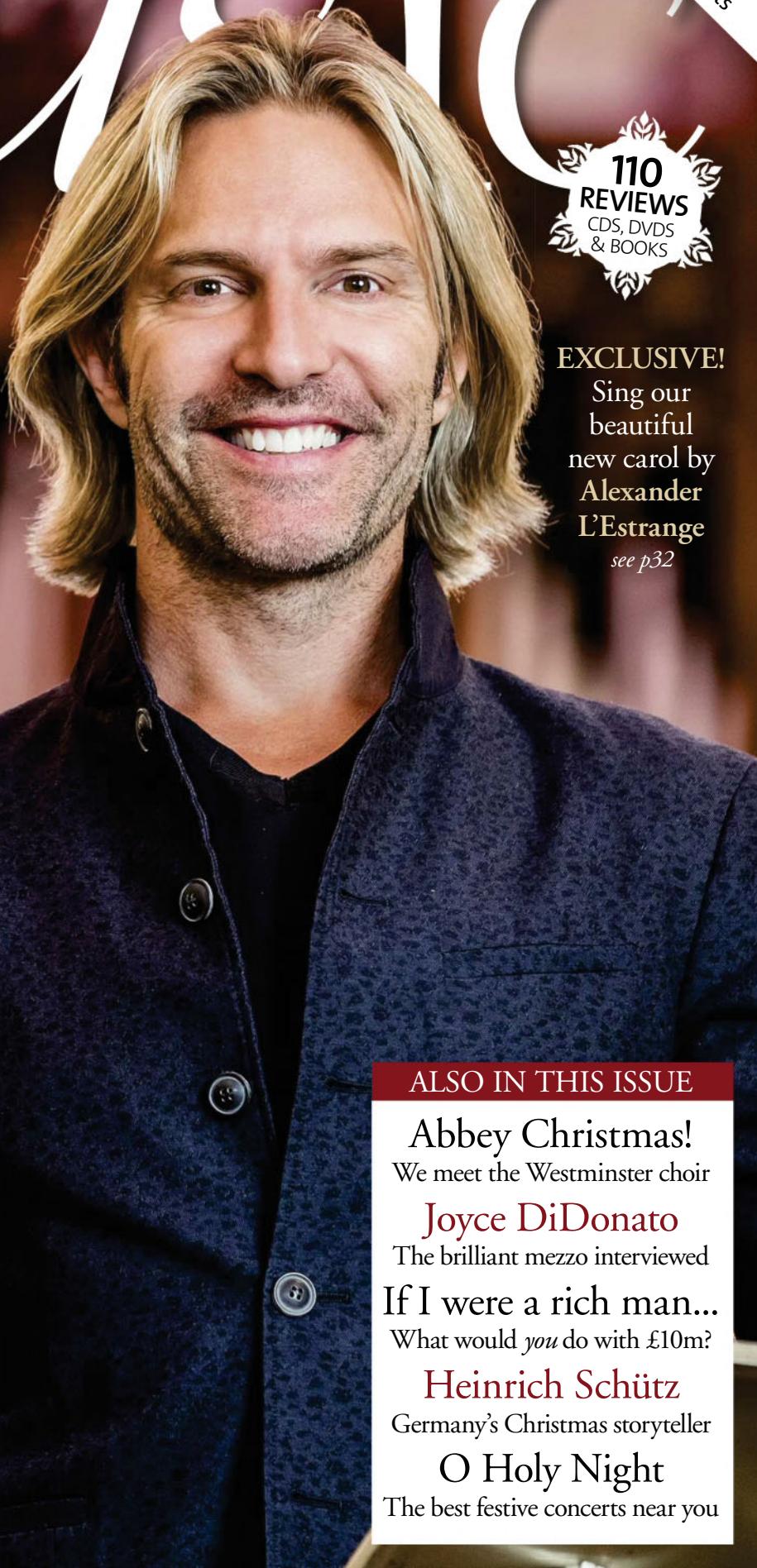
## A CHORAL CHRISTMAS ERIC WHITACRE

How the superstar composer is inspiring the world to sing

Incredible composers  
We discover some forgotten voices

Richard Morrison  
Can Martyn Brabbins turn ENO around?

Francis Poulenc  
The best discs of his *Four Christmas Motets*



EXCLUSIVE!  
Sing our beautiful new carol by Alexander L'Estrange  
*see p32*

110 REVIEWS  
CDS, DVDS & BOOKS

### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Abbey Christmas!  
We meet the Westminster choir

Joyce DiDonato  
The brilliant mezzo interviewed

If I were a rich man...  
What would *you* do with £10m?

Heinrich Schütz  
Germany's Christmas storyteller

O Holy Night  
The best festive concerts near you

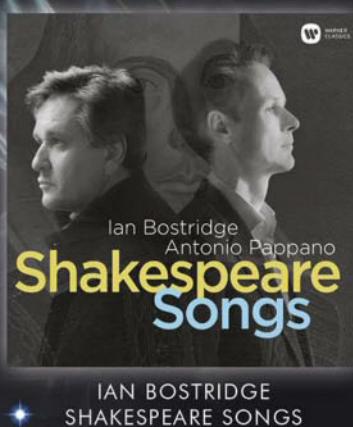


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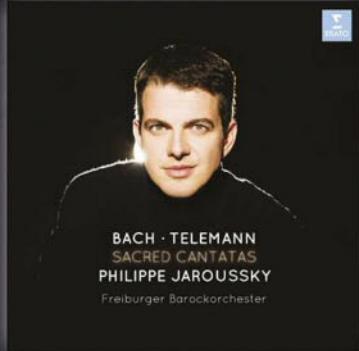
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# THE MONTH IN MUSIC

*The recordings, concerts, broadcasts and websites exciting us this Christmas*

## ON DISC **Tis the season**

This issue's round-up of Christmas discs is a particularly bounteous affair, including a new yuletide offering from this month's cover CD stars, The King's Singers. And Siglo de Oro, an impressive new choir on the UK scene, makes its recording debut with an imaginative programme for Advent. *See p66*

GETTY

## ON STAGE **Dickens alive!**

Christmas at Saffron Hall begins with a chill and a scowl but ends with jollity and warmth, as Neil Brand's musical version of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* invites the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Singers to get in touch with their inner Scrooge. Conductor Martin André directs the bah-humbugging. *See p94*

## ON AIR **Oh Christmas Three**

BBC Radio 3 intends to get into the Christmas party spirit with a festive *In Tune*, broadcast live from the Radio Theatre on 21 December. Presenter Sean Rafferty will be packing in plenty of yuletide-themed music and readings, with guests including the Septura brass septet and Temple Church Choir. *See p93*



## ONLINE **Festively inspired**

There'll be spires and songs aplenty throughout the festive season on the *BBC Music Magazine* website, thanks to our Advent Calendar of Cathedrals (Milan cathedral pictured). From 1 December, head over to [classical-music.com](http://classical-music.com), where each day we'll introduce a different cathedral from around the world, complete with a clip of choral or organ music recorded within it.



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We meet composer  
Eric Whitacre in his  
home city of Los Angeles



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mezzo Joyce DiDonato  
talks to James Naughtie



PAGE 36:  
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What would you do with £10 million? We ask ten leading musicians how they'd spend it

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fantastic offer

## THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS

### Terry Blain

Music journalist and critic



'What's most striking about the American composer Eric Whitacre is the natural, organic use that he is making of the internet and social media to take the act of choral singing to places it has never been previously.' *Page 22*

### Alexander L'Estrange

Composer



'Choosing words for this year's Christmas carol commission was a challenge but I found a good one: "Love came down at Christmas" by Christina Rossetti. See what I've done with it, and give it a try with your choir!' *Page 32*

### Ashutosh Khandekar

Writer and editor



'Entering Westminster Abbey Choir School, I was struck by the sense of history and deep-seated tradition, but also of boys living together as a modern, friendly and civilised family, a world away from Dickensian gloom.' *Page 36*

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- Plus: the official chart, interviews, competitions, radio and TV highlights, a preview of our monthly cover CD and much more!

COVER: MARC ROYCE THIS PAGE: MARC ROYCE, JOHN MILLAR, PAUL GROVER

The licence to publish this magazine was acquired from BBC Worldwide by Immediate Media Company on 1 November 2011. We remain committed to making a magazine of the highest editorial quality, one that complies with BBC editorial and commercial guidelines and connects with BBC programmes.

# Welcome



Back in 2009, American composer Eric Whitacre's Virtual Choir was a stroke of genius. Harnessing the power of social media and online communities and forums, and capturing the imaginations of choral singers worldwide, the latest incarnation of the

VC attracted over 8,000 singers, each recording their single vocal part from the comfort of their own home. The results are wonderful, Whitacre's music inventive, challenging but also attractive, singable and popular – he knows how to hit the sweet spot of each voice part. A rare thing in a composer today. Whitacre now plans to go even bigger with his VC, as you'll read on p22. It's a staggering demonstration of how the internet, rather than pushing us all, divided, further underground, can help create something truly global and positive. And we all need a bit of that in our lives these days...

We're hoping to create a bit of a choral splash ourselves this month

We're also hoping to create a bit of a choral splash ourselves this month – albeit, we admit, on a slightly smaller scale. This year's carol, commissioned from the terrific Alexander L'Estrange, is a peaceful, beautiful miniature that I hope you'll enjoy singing this year and in the Christmases to come. You'll find the score to the four-part unaccompanied *Love came down at Christmas* on p32, and you can download the PDF from our website, too. Let us know how you get on with it – and do email us audio and video YouTube links at [music@classical-music.com](mailto:music@classical-music.com) which we can then share on our website.

Sometimes, however, to improve the world, it takes a bit of hard cash. So what would you do if you were presented with £10 million and the chance to make a difference to the world of music? Would you help finance a concert hall in your home town? Provide instruments for your local school? Spend it all on a magnificent production of the *Ring* cycle in your back garden? We asked ten leading musicians for their responses, all of which are fascinating. Now we just have to find a way of actually getting that money into their hands... And finally, from all of us here at *BBC Music Magazine*, Happy Christmas!

*Oliver Condy*

Oliver Condy *Editor*



# LETTERS

Write to: The editor, *BBC Music Magazine*, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol, BS1 3BN or email: music@classical-music.com

## LETTER OF THE MONTH



BY GEORGE!  
Gershwin bestrode  
two musical worlds

## A NATION'S MISSING COMPOSERS

I was stunned by the omissions in your *A-Z of American Music*. American classical music predates the British colonies: Spanish colonists in Mexico and California produced a thriving Renaissance musical culture blending native with immigrant. How could you leave out 'America's Schubert' Stephen Foster? Where is mention of Negro spirituals? Not giving jazz a place of its own is a glaring omission. Marian Anderson was a world-renowned contralto before her 1939 Lincoln Memorial Concert; her Met

Opera debut so late in her career was a terrible racial slur. Where is New Orleans-born creole composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk, the only pianist Liszt feared? The fine composers of the Second New England School wrote captivating music. Finally, where is George Gershwin? He alone bestrode the worlds of classical and popular music. No survey of American music, however brief, is complete without him.

Colleen Fay, via email



Every month the editor will award a SolarDAB 2 Roberts radio (retail value £80 – see [www.robertsradio.co.uk](http://www.robertsradio.co.uk)) to the writer of the best letter received. The editor reserves the right to shorten letters for publication.

## MUSIC OF THE STREETS

Your photo of composer Philip Glass strolling on the lower West Side of New York (*A-Z of American Music*, November) struck a deep chord. Behind him walks an obviously poor, maybe homeless, person carrying his belongings strapped to his belt. The young composer holds in his hands a score; his expression is troubled. The urban setting, bestrewn streets, harsh concrete and steel, the poverty and sadness juxtaposed against the inspiration and hope of composition make a powerful statement. So much essential American music (the blues, jazz and, yes, classical) emerges from this contrast.

Mashey Bernstein,  
Santa Barbara, US

## BACH ON TRACK

I thought *The Best of British* cover CD (October) was too Brexit-ish for comfort and I didn't enjoy listening to it either. Then, in November, I was delighted with Reich's *The Desert Music*, all new to me, and this month's Bach *The Art of Fugue* is utterly wonderful. I am back to being delighted with the variety and – my original aim – the opportunity to learn much more about music, affordably and with surprises.

Anna Hughes, London

## TITLED SUCCESS

The latest annual Oxford Lieder Festival is now over, and it was as brilliant as ever – superb but not showy, diverse but not diffuse. And there was one extraordinary innovation which seems to have met the approval of the loyal and attentive audiences – surtitles.

The texts and translations were still available in a neat little booklet, but they were also displayed on a couple of screens behind the performers.

Even those who curse surtitles in the opera house had to admit that they worked rather well: we were presented with several lines at a time, so the display was not constantly changing, and they were in the same line of sight as the performers. Best of all, they prevented that terrible bane of the song recital: audiences with their eyes on the programme book rather than the stage. The result was another triumph for this most wonderful of music festivals.

Jonathan Réé, Oxford

## THE EDITOR REPLIES

Good to hear. We will be exploring other concert hall innovations in a feature in next month's issue.

## A PRIVATE MATTER

I'm glad that at last I own a recording of *The Art of Fugue*, thanks to *BBC Music Magazine* (December). It has served to remind me why this work has never joined my other 1,200 CDs after nearly 40 years of collecting.

That it is the work of a supreme contrapuntalist and a towering genius is in no doubt. But even in the hands of such musically accomplished, persuasive and informed artists as harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani and the Academy of Ancient Music, for me it effortlessly answered the question, raised again in the liner notes, of whether Bach intended it for public performance: no, absolutely not!

It's a highly subjective reaction, I know; but I am just left cold,



**PARTNERS IN SWING:**  
Duke Ellington and his  
collaborator Billy Strayhorn

in total contrast with any other fugues by Bach I have come to know from hearing them. I can listen with pleasure to the completist exercise that are the fugues of the '48', whether on the piano or the harpsichord, while many of the great organ fugues make the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end.

**Philip Mitchell, Winchester**

## TWO OF A KIND

It was fascinating to see Peter Musk's BBC librettos for Mozart and Rossini from the 1920s (*Letters*, December). If anybody wonders how the one for *The Barber of Seville* (1926) was permitted to contain commercial advertising, it is because there have been two BBCs. First came the British Broadcasting Company Ltd (1922–26), to be followed by the anti-advertising public service British Broadcasting Corporation, which published *Cosi fan tutte* (1928). The two librettos nicely illustrate this significant difference.

**RE Rawles, via email**

## CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

I defer to few in my admiration for Duke Ellington, who was rightly included in your *A to Z of American Music* feature. If compelled to name America's

greatest composer I would be hard-pressed, but Ellington would probably prevail over Copland, Ives, Barber and Joplin. This said, my citation would have to include an asterisk, with a footnote giving his musical collaborator Billy Strayhorn ample credit as well.

Characteristic of the still-inadequate depth of this man's imprint in posterity is your misattributing Duke's signature tune 'Take the A Train' to Ellington. Strayhorn wrote the melody by himself (Joya Sherrill was the lyricist). Strayhorn was also the co-writer of 'Satin Doll' and many other famous works we associate with Ellington, although he was denied songwriting credits for years.

**David English, via email**

## THE EDITOR REPLIES

Thanks to all who have written to correct us on this matter.

## LOST WOMEN

Seven generations of supremely musical Bachs (December) is a wonderful record, but nothing like as remarkable and wonderful as seven generations without a single woman in the family tree. No sisters, no wives, no mothers: Veit Bach, 'the man who started it all' did it by himself, apparently.

I found a mention of one wife, JS Bach's second (his first

unnamed) who 'enjoyed walks in the city's new public gardens (she loved yellow carnations)'. Not only was she a musician herself, she helped to earn the family income, raised the children of his first wife, and bore 13 of her own. Have you no idea how exhausting and dangerous it was to have so many children?

Having read in an earlier issue that Mozart had a very gifted sister, whose education was neglected in favour of her brother's, I think it shameful that today the contribution of the women in these families should still be ignored; and unlikely that at least some were not also highly gifted musicians. These men did not live alone, nor were they only taken care of by their servants. All of us thrive in a network of families and connections to further our efforts, giving us education, time and encouragement. Please stop perpetuating this daft idea that a family of geniuses was exclusively male.

**Kavya Hughes, London**

## TAKING STOCK

Roland de Moor's memory (*Letters*, November) serves him well when he says that the recent issue of Beethoven's *Eroica* was the first duplication of a symphony by *BBC Music Magazine* in its history. I have catalogued all of the cover CDs by date and composer, and have discovered a small number of 'repeats', including Bax's *Tintagel*, Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E flat (Op. 81a), Brahms's Violin Concerto, Chopin's Ballade No. 1 and Debussy's *Prélude à l'après midi d'un faune*.

More interesting, of course, is the overview of coverage in *BBC Music Magazine* over the years, sometimes quite extensive for individual composers, albeit inevitably with some shortfalls. Above all, such a cataloguing shows just how fine and varied a collection the magazine has provided over the years.

**Malcolm Instone, Hertfordshire**

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Thanks to Daniel Jaffé, Sirikorn Green

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Jacky Perales-Morris  
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# The Full Score

OUR PICK OF THE MONTH'S NEWS, VIEWS AND INTERVIEWS

## Martyn Brabbins takes ENO baton

*British conductor appointed music director of English National Opera with immediate effect*



OPERATIC HOPE:  
will Martyn Brabbins  
bring stability to ENO?

**E**nglish National Opera has announced Martyn Brabbins as its new music director. The popular English conductor, 57, has taken up the role with immediate effect, filling a gap that was created by the sudden and unexpected resignation of Mark Wigglesworth in March. With a contract that keeps him at the Coliseum until at least 2020, Brabbins will now get to work with ENO artistic director Daniel Kramer in planning future seasons. He is also pencilled in to conduct a production next year. The ENO faithful, meanwhile, will be hoping that his appointment marks the beginning of a period of stability for the much-loved but beleaguered company.

Brabbins is no stranger to English National Opera, having first conducted there in 2012 in a production of Vaughan Williams's *The Pilgrim's Progress* that met with warm praise from the press. He has also guest-conducted at many other opera houses around Europe, not least Grange Park Opera, where his handling of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* this summer went down a storm. His previous posts outside opera include that of artistic director of the Cheltenham Music Festival, where his three years in charge from 2005-7 saw him introduce innovative ideas such as performances of the complete Tchaikovsky and Beethoven symphonies in one day.

BEN EALOVEGA, GETTY

### Coliseum conductors



Recent ENO music directors

**Mark Elder (1979-93)**  
**Sian Edwards (1993-5)**  
**Paul Daniel (above, 1997-2005)**  
**Edward Gardner (2007-15)**  
**Mark Wigglesworth (2015-16)**  
**Martyn Brabbins (from 2016)**

With recent cuts made to ENO's budget and ongoing scepticism over the management's plans for its future, Brabbins's job is seen by many as something as a poisoned chalice, and he himself admits that he joins the company 'in a tough financial climate'. However, even during this most turbulent of periods, standards on stage have remained impressively high. 'With an orchestra and chorus of such exceptional calibre and a musical legacy nurtured by the finest British conductors,' he says, 'I feel incredibly honoured to have been invited to become a part of this treasured British musical company. I am determined that ENO will continue to produce stimulating operatic performances of the highest musical quality at the London Coliseum.'

*See Richard Morrison, p21*



# Cain and Hyde take Radio 2 Young Chorister spoils

*Singers from Warwick and Rochester enjoy success in prestigious BBC singing competition*

Edward Hyde and Florence Cain will be displaying big grins from the choir stalls this Christmas, as the latest winners of BBC Radio 2's Young Choristers of the Year competition. Thirty years since the BBC named its first ever Choirgirl of the Year, Cain won the girls' division of the contest with performances of *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*

**Florence Cain told the Manchester audience that winning felt 'just crazy'**

and 'How beautiful are the feet' from Handel's *Messiah*. A chorister at St Mary's Church in Warwick, Cain told the audience at the final at Manchester Cathedral that winning felt 'just crazy'. In the boys' division, it was a case of Kent domination, with all four finalists coming from Canterbury and Rochester Cathedral choirs. Rochester's Edward Hyde sang to victory with *I vow to thee*



**CHORAL CHAMPS:**  
Florence Cain and  
Edward Hyde celebrate

*my country* and Bob Chilcott's *Be Thou my vision*. The latter will have been very familiar to one of the judges – namely Bob Chilcott himself, who took his place in the jury alongside singing tutor Carrie Grant and Christopher Stokes, master of the choristers at Manchester Cathedral.

## Young Chorister finalists



**LAST EIGHT:** at the final in Manchester

**Edward Hyde** (Rochester Cathedral)  
**Rupert Walker** (Rochester Cathedral)  
**Oliver Futcher** (Canterbury Cathedral)  
**Joseph Henry** (Canterbury Cathedral)  
**Amelia Lewis** (Newcastle Cathedral)  
**Lucy Evans** (St Mary's, Harrow)  
**Florence Cain** (St Mary's, Warwick)  
**Hannah Dienes-Williams** (Guildford Cathedral)

## RISING STAR Great artists of tomorrow

### **Yoon-Kyung Cho** cellist

BBC Music Magazine's *Rising Star* slot is often filled with tales of brilliant young things who first picked up their instrument almost as soon as they could stand. For Korean cellist Yoon-Kyung Cho, it all happened a little later. 'I actually played the piano first,' she tells us, 'but my piano teacher recommended I learn a string instrument, so I started the cello at the age of nine. And then, as I learned more and more, I really fell in love with it.'

So what was it, then, about the cello that reached the parts that the piano evidently failed to reach? 'I once listened to the Berlin Philharmonic's ensemble of 12 cellists,' she says, 'and I was really moved how this instrument can have such a big range, and can play the melodies and the bass and all the middle notes too – it sounded like orchestral music, but with only cellos playing. That was very inspiring.'

**'I've learnt to have my own sound and my own voice'**

Yoon-Kyung completed her school and university studies in Seoul, but the idea of studying abroad always appealed. And so, at the age of 23, a move to the Juilliard School in New York followed and then, two years later, she headed across the Atlantic, this time to continue her musical education at the Royal College of Music. It has been in London that things have really taken off, not least when, earlier this year, she won the Musicians' Company Prince's Prize Competition – a win that came not only with a prize of £10,000, but also the chance to perform in venues such as the Wigmore and Cadogan halls.

Still, though, the studying continues, along with yet another move abroad. Yoon-Kyung, now 27, is presently broadening her orchestral experience with the Staatskapelle Berlin under conductor Daniel Barenboim, no less, and she has also enjoyed masterclasses with the leading French cellist Gautier Capuçon. 'Gautier is really cool!' she enthuses. 'As a player he has a uniqueness in his sound – when I listen to a



**GLOBAL OUTLOOK:**  
Yoon-Kyung Cho has studied in Seoul, NY and London

recording of him, I can right away say it is him. I've learnt that I also need to have my own sound, and my own voice. Gautier appreciates and respects that, and he doesn't say "do this, do that", but really gives me a way to build my sound and my cello playing.'

*Interview by Jeremy Pound*

## THE OFFICIAL CLASSICAL CHART

The UK's best-selling specialist classical releases

Chart for week ending 27 October 2016



- 1 **The Lost Songs of St Kilda**  
Trevor Morrison (piano); Scottish FO/  
James MacMillan Decca 481 2795  
*MacMillan and friends breathe new life into the  
musical heritage of an abandoned archipelago*



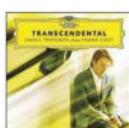
- 2 **Winter Works by Alexander, Arnalds,  
Bingham, Dale, Holst, Pärt, Pott,  
Praetorius, Rachmaninov and Vasks**  
Voces8 Decca 483 0968  
*Atmospheric seasonal repertoire, superbly sung*



- 3 **Wiseman The Musical Zodiac**  
National Symphony Orchestra/Debbie  
Wiseman Classic FM CFMD46  
*From Aries to Pisces, this is an orchestral  
astrological journey in 12 instalments*



- 4 **JS Bach Christmas Oratorio**  
Dunedin Consort/John Butt  
Linn CKD499  
*The Dunedin Consort's take on Bach's festive  
favourite positively sizzles with good cheer*



- 5 **Liszt Transcendental Etudes**  
Daniil Trifonov (piano)  
Deutsche Grammophon 94795529  
*In works often associated with virtuoso display,  
Trifonov provides rare subtlety and restraint*



- 6 **Schubert Piano Trios Opp. 99 & 100**  
Andreas Staier (fortepiano), Daniel  
Sepc (violin), Roel Dieltiens (cello)  
Harmonia Mundi HMC 902233.34  
*Period-instrument Schubert from a masterful trio*



- 7 **Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No. 2 etc**  
Alexandre Tharaud (piano); RLPO/  
Alexander Vedernikov Erato 9029595469  
*Alexandre Tharaud (see right) provides a majestic  
account of Rachmaninov's ever-popular concerto*



- 8 **Christmas with St John's**  
Choir of St John's College, Cambridge/  
Andrew Nethsingha Signum SIGCD458  
*St John's wonder as they wander, see three ships  
and much besides in splendid yuletide style*



- 9 **Vivaldi Concertos and transcriptions**  
Lucie Horsch (recorder); Amsterdam  
Vivaldi Players/C Thompson Decca 483 0896  
*Indulge yourself in a little Horsch play with this  
terrific debut from a brilliant young performer*



- 10 **JS Bach Goldberg Variations**  
Angela Hewitt (piano)  
Hyperion CDA 68146  
*The Canadian pianist tackles the Goldbergs for  
the second time on disc, with pleasing results*

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Nigel Kennedy plays  
his own compositions



## Nigel Kennedy composes himself

Violinist Nigel Kennedy is releasing an album of his own compositions. Titled *My World*, the recording falls into two halves. In 'Dedications', he pays homage to his mentors, including violinists Yehudi Menuhin, Isaac Stern, Stéphane Grappelli and Mark O'Connor. *Three Sisters*, a suite he has composed based on Chekhov's play, completes the disc. It'll be released on Neue Meister records this December. It's billed as his first album of his own compositions, although he is no stranger to improvising, arranging and writing music – it follows his jazz albums *A Very Nice Album* and *SHHH!*, which feature a lot of his own material.

## A Parisian in America



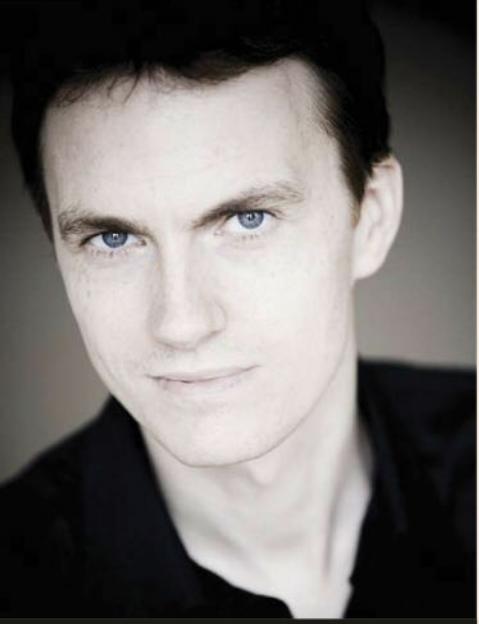
Natalie Dessay has signed to Sony Classical. Her first album for the label, *Pictures of America*, is out this December. It's an exploration of jazz and Broadway music inspired by the paintings of Edward Hopper, reflecting the French soprano's interests beyond the realm of classical music and opera. A collection of Schubert Lieder with regular collaborator Philippe Cassard at the piano follows next spring, and she also hopes to record a new cycle of songs by Michel Legrand. Dessay recorded for Virgin Classics (now Erato) for 22 years. She gave up opera last year, and has since acted on stage and sung in musicals.

## Notes from the trenches

Steven Isserlis is making an album that features a remarkable instrument from the First World War. Made from an ammunition case and wood, the 'trench cello' was played by soldier Harold Triggs, who fought on the battlefields. It came to public attention two years ago, and now Isserlis has recorded a selection of encores on the unusual instrument. 'I went, taking my own strings as the original ones had gone,' said Isserlis of his first encounter with the cello. 'We got it going, and after a while came out this rather wonderful, plaintive and poignant sound.' Wartime works are the focus of the new recording for BIS, with pianist Connie Shih: cello sonatas by Debussy, Fauré and Bridge, and Webern's *Three Little Pieces*.



## REWIND Artists talk about their past recordings



### THIS MONTH Alexandre Tharaud pianist

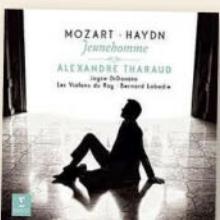
French pianist Alexandre Tharaud has made over 40 recordings, covering repertoire from JS Bach to the contemporary French composer Thierry Pecou. His latest album is an all-Rachmaninov affair, with the Second Piano Concerto at its heart, and is out now on Warner Classics.

### My finest moment

**Mozart** Piano Concerto No. 9; Rondo in A; 'Ch'io mi scordi di te?'

**Haydn** Keyboard Concerto No. 11

Alexandre Tharaud (piano); Les Violons du Roy/Bernard Labadie Erato 2564626268 (2014)



A few years ago I did a recording of Mozart, the *Jeunehomme* Concerto, in Canada. I have recorded 43 CDs, but maybe this was the only one that I felt very good doing. It was made at Le Domaine Forget, around two hours north of Quebec City, in front of the St Lawrence River. There's a big beautiful campus hall with incredible acoustics, and I was so happy to play with this wonderful orchestra under Bernard Labadie. It's one of the best chamber orchestras I know. When you record with an orchestra, you play for a few hours then there's a break. I wanted to get out to explore the country, and I went to the river. It's one of the best places in the world – with the river, the forest, the sky. I was inspired by the view.

### My fondest memory

**Satie** Works including *Gnossiennes*, *Gymnopédies*, *Avant dernières pensées*, *Le Piccadilly*, *Pièces froides*, *Trois morceaux en forme de poire*, *La belle excentrique* and *Cinéma*

Alexandre Tharaud (piano), Juliette (voice), Jean Delescluse (tenor), Eric Le Sage (piano), Isabelle Faust (violin), David Guerrier (trumpet) Harmonia Mundi HMC902017/18 (2009)

It's a small story. A long time ago, maybe eight years, I recorded an Erik Satie album. It was my last album for Harmonia Mundi before I moved to Warner Classics. I recorded it in a small church in Paris, but there was a small bird in the courtyard in front of the church. It was not very noisy but I wasn't able to focus on the music and I remember I was very angry the first day. I

wanted to kill him. But after one day of it, I decided to be his friend. He sang every day for a week, very like the bird in Ravel's piano piece *Oiseaux tristes* (Sad Birds). You can hear him very lightly on the CD sometimes. Finally, we became friends. It was like he was Satie. He said, 'Alexandre, now I'm a little bird. I'm not very sad, I'm not very happy, but I'm here with you and I want to help you.'

### I'd like another go at...

**JS Bach**

**Keyboard Concertos**, BWV 1052, 1054, 1056, 1058 & 1065

Alexandre Tharaud (piano); Les Violons du Roy/Bernard Labadie Erato 0709 132 (2011)

I would like to record all my albums again. I guess most artists say that! I have recorded three albums of Chopin, and I am keen to record more of his music, particularly the Etudes. These 23 studies are very virtuosic, but I like the danger. They are like a sport or doing a marathon. I would definitely like to have another go at my second album dedicated to Bach, with Les Violons du Roy and Bernard Labadie. It was a fantastic experience and still a very good memory for me. I love this orchestra. I love recording with them and spending time

in Quebec where we usually work. But, after five years, I think it could be done better with a different sound maybe. I miss clarity and temperament in the piano sound.



## STUDIOSECRETS

We reveal who's recording what, and where



DONE: William Youn reaches Mozart end

Pianist **William Youn** has reached the fifth and final volume in his complete Mozart piano sonata series. He's heading to Munich to polish off the final notes; the disc will be released on Oehms records.

**The King's Singers** have been in the studio to record their triple album **GOLD**, which will be released next year as part of the group's 50th anniversary celebrations. There will be a disc of close harmony and two of *a cappella* arrangements. It will be released on the Signum Classics label.

**The Ehiphoniconsort** and director Tim Reader have recently recorded their debut disc. The chamber choir headed to St John's Church, Upper Norwood to record choral works by David Bednall, for Delphian Records.

Viola da gamba player **Robert Smith**, member of the acclaimed *Fantasticus* ensemble, has headed to North Yorkshire, to St Hilda's Parish Church, Sherburn, to record an all-Telemann recital for Resonus Classics. He's focused on the Fantasias for viola da gamba, works lost for many years but recently rediscovered.

Albanian violinist **Tedi Papavrami**, whose previous discs include works by Saint-Saëns and Ysaÿe, has again been indulging his love of all things French and Belgian, this time by heading into the studio for Fauré's and Franck's Violin Sonatas. Joining him for the recording, on the Alpha label, was pianist Nelson Goerner.

## #78 HYMN

IN THE ORIGINAL 1967 film *Bedazzled*, Peter Cook's Satan perches on a mailbox and invites Dudley Moore to praise him. After a while, Moore rebels: 'Here, I'm getting a bit bored with this. Can't we change places?' There's the modern, post-Nietzschean 'death of God' position in a nutshell. But even the über-egocentric Nietzsche admitted there were times when he missed having a god to praise. And it seems the urge to worship something greater than ourselves – especially in song – runs deep in our nature, as a visit to the football terraces should loudly affirm.

The ancient Greeks hymned either Apollo (radiant order) or Dionysus (dark disorder) in their public rites. The early Christian church opted for something closer to Apollo, preferring literally to demonise Dionysus. But like the Greeks, the Church Fathers recognised the twofold value of hymns: not only did they counteract self-inflation in individuals, they fused them together into a community by focusing their collective attention beyond themselves.

## DISCOVERING MUSIC

*Stephen Johnson gets to grips with classical music's technical terms*



The earliest Christian hymns date from the fourth century. They could be metrical (based on regular rhythmic patterns), or more like modern free verse: a striking example of the second type being the *Tu Deum* ('We praise thee, O God') – which, according to a charming legend, was supposed to have

been improvised antiphonally by saints Ambrose and Augustine after the latter's baptism. If the metrical regularity of type one was reflected in the musical setting, this made the hymn more memorable. A congregation used to singing them might therefore recognise and identify with them when they were woven into the more elaborate polyphonic church compositions of the Middle Ages.

These would still be in Latin however, which means some members of the congregation would have sung the words without much idea of what they meant. It was after the Reformation, and the translation of the Bible into everyday language, that hymns too were written in the vernacular, often to simple, characterful tunes. Arch-reformer Martin Luther was influential here, on everyday worship, and on high art: the use of

Lutheran hymns in the music of JS Bach can still be stirring today, even for the most resistant hearts. Some of Luther's hymns (or 'chorales') are still sung in churches all over the Christian world, holding their own against soft-pop, theology-light modern confections like 'Shine, Jesus, Shine'. Or is that just wishful thinking?

## Hall hopes dashed?



London's hopes for a new concert hall have been nipped in the bud. Though £5.5m had been put aside by former chancellor George Osborne for a feasibility study into building a 'Centre of Music'

in the capital, the government has now decided the money would be best spent elsewhere. 'London is already home to world class culture and music venues,' says a spokesman. 'The government has concluded that [a new hall] does not currently offer value for money for taxpayers and is not affordable.' Though he himself has not yet given his reaction to the decision, some fear that Sir Simon Rattle (above) may now have second thoughts about becoming musical director of the LSO – the conductor's decision to take the post was partly reliant on the provision of a new venue.

MAT HENNEK ILLUSTRATION: ADAM HOWLING

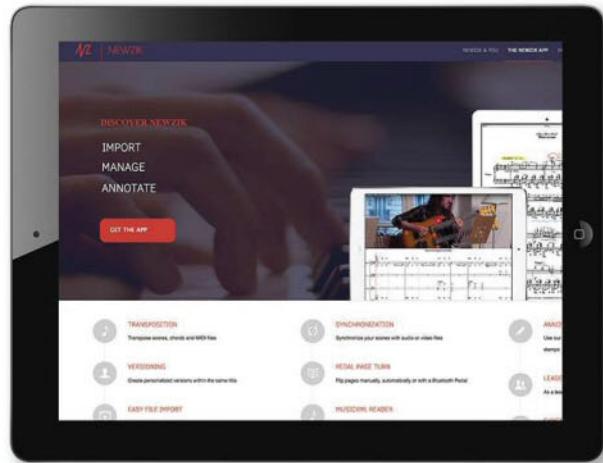
## APP REVIEW

*Every issue we explore a recent digital product*

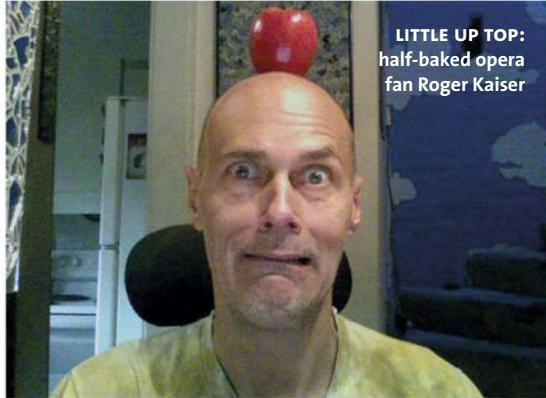
### Newsik FREE

Imagine having all your sheet music in one place, yet available to you on any device via the Cloud. Then imagine you can annotate your scores as easily as you can a physical copy. Next, imagine using a pedal to move through the piece rather than stopping to turn a page. We've been promised all this before, but Newsik has delivered. With a new partnership with online music library IMSLP on the horizon, Newsik users will have access to over 370,000 free scores, as well as any digitised scores they own. Under Newsik's free plan, users can store up to 30 titles, but the unlimited version is just

£14.99. And a group plan is available to ensembles, enabling musicians to see each other's annotations. Opéra de Rouen recently performed an entire concert using Newsik; I'm sure many will follow in their footsteps. *Elinor Cooper ★★★★*



## A Tell with a sorry ending



There's a time and place for sprinkling the ashes of a late friend, but mid-way through *William Tell* probably isn't one of them. This, alas, is what opera fanatic Roger Kaiser recently did at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, causing the performance to be brought to a halt. When Kaiser, who hails from Texas, was seen pouring white powder into the orchestra pit during the second interval of Rossini's 1829 epic, Met management evacuated the building, fearing the substance might be something more sinister – only after the rest of the opera had been called off was it discovered to be harmless. The well-meaning, if misguided, Kaiser had by then headed off downtown for dinner. He was not charged.

## TWITTER ROOM

Who's saying what on the micro-blogging site



@nicholascollon All my 'eventful' concert stories will forever be eclipsed by this afternoon – an exploding light falling into the bassoon section, on fire Eek. Conductor Nicholas Collon (left) enjoys an incandescent moment from the wind section

@ayepatz I'm revising my previous 'Wagner was a genius' position to 'Wagner was a cruel sadist.' #holländerhell Bass-baritone Iain Paterson finds *The Flying Dutchman* isn't all plain sailing

@WatkinsHuw Who knew #Ravel had made it to @THSHBirmingham? I wonder if he went for a balti after the show...

Composer Huw Watkins ponders an intriguing meeting of French composer and lamb bhuna gosht

@violincase I wonder if flight attendants are unnerved by attentive viewers during the safety demo.

Further ponderings, this time from sky-bound violinist Hilary Hahn (right)

@Baddiel I only like folk or classical music when it's slow and sad. [...] as soon as it's upbeat and jaunty I want to kill myself.

We'd advise comedian David Baddiel to stay well away from the Strauss family...

## Notes from the piano stool David Owen Norris



**I**t had been a stimulating morning, working with the cast of *Amadeus* at the National Theatre. We'd roared our way through a very vulgar canon by Mozart, and a much more prim and proper one by Salieri. We'd clapped Mozart and whistled Mozart, and paced him out around the rehearsal room. And now on the train home, I was sleepy, but I suddenly heard Mozart's voice...

'Happy Christmas, Salieri!' 'Ah, my dear Mozart, Happy Christmas!' 'Hey, now that they've found the one surviving copy of that piece we wrote together, d'you think they might get over all this poisoning stuff?' 'Alas, I think Pushkin and Peter Shaffer between them have made the idea indelible.' 'Just what you wanted, you clever old rogue.'

There was a touch of hauteur in Salieri's reply. 'I wasn't quite myself shortly before I joined you up here,' he huffed. 'Well, you can't say it hasn't worked,' replied Wolfgang. 'Beethoven owned opera scores by me, you, Paisiello and Méhul. You're the famous one – well, after me, of course.' Beethoven's quite famous... 'Yes, back in the 1930s he was way out ahead of me. I think it's because the '30s found things

**'You're a rude scoundrel, Wolfgang. Remember, I can hear in heaven'**

difficult, and after all, Beethoven's the only person that's ever been celebrated precisely *because* he found things difficult.'

Salieri sniggered. 'Those eternal sketchbooks!' he exclaimed. 'Such terrible ideas, to start with.' 'What an idiot!' said Mozart. 'Oh, hello Ludwig.' 'You're a rude scoundrel, Wolfgang. Remember, I can *hear* in heaven.' He hurried on, and there was a resentful silence.

'Whereas I found things easy,' continued Mozart. 'Since the computer came along, I've really fitted into the *zeitgeist*.' 'Ah, your command of languages,' said Salieri. 'Well, practise a little Italian, now – here comes Cherubini.'

'Was that bloody Beethoven?' puffed a new voice. 'You were as famous as him once, weren't you?' said Mozart, with feigned innocence. Cherubini exploded. 'Much more famous!! That talentless waster had to copy me even to manage his pathetic ONE opera. But it's all *Fidelio*, *Fidelio* – no one puts on my *Deux Journées*. Or any of the others. I must have written, ooh, three dozen at least.'

'Indeed,' said Salieri, 'and I wrote two score. You know, Beethoven only plucked up the courage to write *Fidelio* because of his lessons with me.' 'More fool you.' 'I only managed 21, and some of them are no better than yours,' interrupted Mozart. 'You should have done Salieri's trick, Luigi, and pretended to have poisoned Beethoven.'

'What d'you mean, pretended?' bellowed Cherubini. 'My one mistake was not to tell anyone...' ■

*David Owen Norris is a pianist, composer and Radio 3 presenter*

# MUSIC TO MY EARS

*What the classical world has been listening to this month*



**HOLY INSPIRATION:**  
The Priests' musical loves  
include Gustave Charpentier  
and Van Morrison

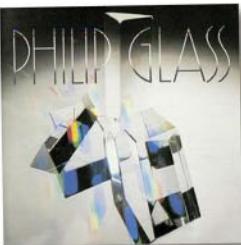
## THE PRIESTS *vocal trio*

We were introduced to the music of composer **Ola Gjeilo** about a year ago through his *Ubi Caritas*, which we sang in a choral group that we are part of. It really resonated with us, and as we got more interested in his music, we came across his piece *The Ground*. It weaves the words 'Pleni sunt coeli' into a lovely melody, and while it sounds simple, the simple-sounding pieces are often the hardest to perform! Tenebrae sing it beautifully on their 2016 recording of Gjeilo's music.

■ We're all fascinated by the music of **Philip Glass**. What's amazing about Glass is that you can recognise him immediately through his style, and yet everything he composes is different. There's a charming relentlessness about his music plus those repetitive chords that reassure you that you know where you're going... and yet he still takes you by surprise. Glass is such an eclectic composer in his output, but the piece we'd choose is 'Island' from his *Glassworks*.

■ When we were putting together our new album, we thought about singing **Van Morrison**'s 'Whenever God shines his light'.

There's a recording of a version of it by an *a cappella* Australian group called The Idea of North which is just fantastic – you find that you can't help but tap your feet to it when



## OUR CHOICES

*The BBC Music team's current favourites*



**Oliver Condy**

*Editor*

Within  
**Rimsky-**  
**Korsakov**'s

opera *Christmas Eve*, which tells Gogol's story of Vakula's attempt to court his beloved Oxana, lies a beautiful orchestral suite. There's an air of excited expectation in the opening to the opera itself, 'Holy Night' – a major influence, surely, of many scores to festive Hollywood films. Rimsky's sparkling orchestration combines harp, glockenspiel, flute and trilling strings for a magical effect.



**Jeremy Pound**

*Deputy editor*

For me, the pick of last year's festive releases was *Carols from Queen's*, a superbly sung disc by the Oxford college's mixed-voice choir. I drove my family to distraction with repeated playings of the likes of Philip Stopford's *Lully, Lulla, Lullay* and John Rutter's arrangement of *O Holy Night*, and have every intention of doing exactly the same thing this year, too.



**Rebecca Franks**

*Reviews editor*

I stumbled across  
**Richard**

**Rodney Bennett's** *Five Carols* thanks to a tip from a friend who runs a choir, while doing some listening for this month's *Classical Connections* piece. These poised, atmospheric carols, setting medieval texts, are yet another example of this still underrated composer's skill and artistry. I particularly like the cool beauty of *There is no Rose and Sweet was the song*.

you hear it. Van Morrison is, of course, a local boy for us here in Northern Ireland, and a wonderful songwriter too.

■ Over the years, all three of us have taken part in opera productions, from Donizetti and Verdi to Britten, and are big fans of opera in general. 'Depuis le jour' from the beginning of Act III of **Charpentier's Louise** is one of those beautiful arias that can happily stand on its own on the concert platform. In her recording of it Joan Sutherland sounds so effortless, and the timbre of her voice is utterly unique. *BBC Music Magazine* was talking to *The Priests'* Father Eugene O'Hagan; *The Priests'* new album 'Alleluia' is out now

## MATTHEW KANER *composer*



**Jürg Frey**

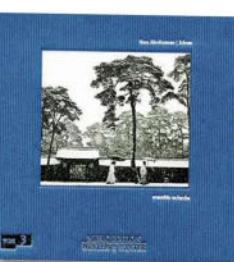
Swiss composer **Jürg Frey** writes this incredibly still, spacious music. I've been getting into his work over the last six months. I find it beautiful and calming. I've been listening to a recording of chamber music and the centrepiece is *Extended Circular Music*, which has tracks for different instrumentations and all with the same similar spacious feeling to them. The recording's first piece is called *Mémoire, horizon* and is for saxophone quartet. It's incredibly beautiful.

■ I love the saxophonist **Shabaka Hutchings**. He's brought out something that's a bit more like a solo album recently, *Shabaka and the Ancestors*, which is more in the free jazz vein. His playing is phenomenal, just indescribably good. I've seen him live a few times, and recently at a gig in which he played clarinet and a bit of bass clarinet with a poet.

His clarinet playing is so beautiful, kind of the opposite of his saxophone playing, which is powerful and raucous.

■ **Hans Abrahamsen** was the inspiration for my piece *Snowbells*. I was responding to his piece *Schnee*, and all the pieces

he's composed since that one have been so beautiful and pared back. There are these fine, glistening, undulating textures, and it's often very surprising music. When *Schnee* came out it made people think differently about what contemporary music was and what direction it might be going in. I'm always excited to see what he's doing.



■ **Robert Glasper**, the jazz crossover pianist, does a lot of stuff with hip-hop and R&B artists as well as his more serious jazz stuff. I really like the album that he brought out quite recently, *Everything's Beautiful*, which is sort of a collaboration with Miles Davis. He's taken clips of Davis speaking in the studio, or snippets of him playing a solo, and then made new tracks with them. And Glasper's playing itself is just amazing. As Radio 3's embedded composer, Matthew Kaner is writing a new work every week until 7 Dec. Each piece is premiered on Monday's Breakfast programme

## CAROLINA EYCK theremin player



Last year, I played with the jazz musician **Jacob Collier** – he harmonised on the piano while I played 'Ave Maria' – and it was incredibly inspiring to hear him

perform. He has since released an album called *In My Room*, and it's great. His style is pretty mixed, from world music to funk, and he plays a range of instruments, switching from one to another.

■ **Maria Joāo** is a singer from Portugal who I've been listening to for quite a long time, and I like her a lot. Her way of improvising is really free – I think she sort of switches off her brain when she does it, and just goes for it and is really in the moment. She sings in a lot of styles, including traditional Portuguese music and jazz, and jumps from singing melodies to making sounds, which is really interesting. Her album called *Sol* is particularly good.

■ I like **Jaga Jazzist**, a group from Norway whose music I was introduced to by a friend about five years ago and who I listen to a lot on CD. I love the

## OUR CHOICES

*The BBC Music team's current favourites*



**Neil McKim**

Production editor

Dedicated to his

granddaughter, **Liszt**'s 1881 *Weihnachtsbaum* (Christmas Tree) for solo piano is a delightful work consisting of 12 varied movements. Not all of those movements are Christmas related, but along the way we hear arrangements of *O Holy Night*, *In dulci jubilo* and *O Come, All Ye Faithful*. I've been enjoying Alfred Brendel's recording, made back in 1951.



**Elinor Cooper**

Editorial assistant

It doesn't feel like Christmas until I've found a new favourite disc of festive choral music. This year I've been listening to **The Sixteen**'s new release, *Song of the Nativity*. Alongside favourite carols like *Adam Lay Ybounden* and *O Little Town of Bethlehem* there are wonderful works to discover such as Cecilia McDowall's *Now May We Singen* and Gabriel Jackson's *The Christ Child*.

**FREE SPIRIT:**  
Portuguese singer  
Maria Joāo



harmonies they use in their compositions and, in fact, their composing style in general. There are quite a few of them in the group and they use a lot of different instruments in a really interesting way. I have listened to all of their albums, but especially like *The Stix*.

■ Recently, I played in a concert and there was a brilliant Syrian singer called **Dima Orsho**. She sang in a traditional Arabic way, which I was both touched by and found inspiring. I felt like there was a deep connection to her tradition, which all came out in her voice. When she sang, it was as if she was showing us the whole history of her country. As a musician, I find the human voice a very inspiring instrument. *Carolina Eyck's new recording 'Fantasias'*, on *Butterscotch Records*, will be reviewed next month

## AND MUSIC TO YOUR EARS...

You tell us what you've been enjoying on disc and in the concert hall



**Stuart Law Fleet**

With a concert performance of **Elgar's** Symphony No. 2 fresh in my mind, I decided to revisit Anthony Payne's 'elaboration' of the sketches for the Third. It reminded me what a masterful job Payne did. Most of the orchestration sounds as if it's come directly from the pen of Elgar himself. If the finale, which Payne admitted gave him the most problems, is maybe less satisfying, the quiet gong stroke that ends the work seems entirely appropriate.



**Chris Davies Dorset**

I recently purchased a recording of the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra performing **Martinů's** Symphonies Nos 3 & 4, so it was with great interest that I

listened to Radio 3's *Composer of the Week* programmes on him. Also on Radio 3, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra's (BSO) live broadcast of Walton's Symphony No. 2, conducted by Kirill Karabits was outstanding and, before that, the encore from pianist Simon Trpčeski of the Rachmaninov's *Vocalise* with BSO cellist Jesper Svedberg was an absolute delight.



**Aart Roest**

Amsterdam, Holland  
**Berlioz's Symphonie fantastique**

is one of my favourite works. Until recently, I preferred the recordings by conductors Ataúlio Argenta, Charles Munch and Colin Davis. Then, Daniele Gatti conducted it in his first



concert as chief conductor of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra – it was subtle, elastic, comic and soft where needed. It gave me so much joy that I have relived it again online four times so far!



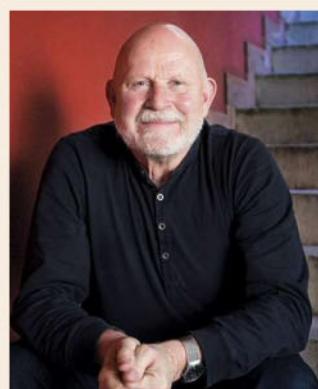
**Roderick Elliem**

Melbourne

At the Stellenbosch Chamber Music Festival in South Africa earlier this year I heard the music of **Péteris Vasks** (right) for the first time – his violin concerto, called *Distant Light*,

is absolutely entrancing. I have since listened to more of his music and am fascinated by it. Just recently, too, thanks to your *Building a Library* article on Vaughan Williams's Fourth Symphony, I have been exploring all the composer's symphonies (the

Boult and Handley cycles) and Walton's Symphony No. 1 (with Edward Gardner and André Previn) as well as the music of Bax and Bliss. Tell us what concerts or recordings you've been enjoying by emailing us at [musictomears@classical-music.com](mailto:musictomears@classical-music.com)



'ENTRANCING': Péteris Vasks

## NEWS IN BRIEF



TUNEFUL TIPPLE: a composer's dram

### MAX ENJOYMENT

A message written by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies in a friend's score of *An Orkney Wedding with Sunrise* has given tips on which whiskies best accompany his work. 'Think about Highland Park or Scapa (MY favouritel) before lifting the baton,' the composer advised conductor Christopher Warren-Green. Both distilleries are to be found on Orkney, where Max lived for 45 years.

### ACCORDION WOE

Less jollity, alas, at The Piano and Accordion Shop in Sunningdale, which recently suffered a break-in – 39 accordions worth over £130,000 were stolen. As the finer models, such as the Italian-made Cooperativa 508 Elite 120 Bass, were targeted, it is reckoned that the thieves knew exactly what they were after.

### DUBAI DO

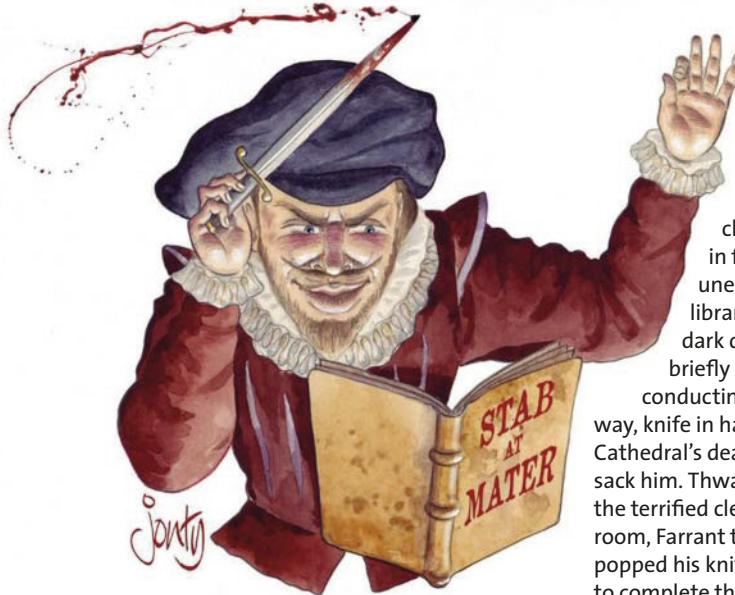
The United Arab Emirates is going to get its first ever taste of the BBC Proms. In March, six 'BBC Proms Dubai' concerts will be staged in the Gulf state, featuring the likes of pianist Benjamin Grosvenor, conductor Edward Gardner and the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

### MARK THE DIARY

Wednesday 19 April, meanwhile, will see the prestigious BBC Music Magazine Awards take place at Kings Place in London... and you're invited! We are pleased to reveal that tickets for the event are now on sale, and can be bought online at [www.seetickets.com/tour/bbc-music-magazine-awards-2017](http://www.seetickets.com/tour/bbc-music-magazine-awards-2017). We look forward to enjoying your company.

## A mean dean killing machine

*Document reveals the bloody tale of a Salisbury choirmaster*



Salisbury Cathedral in the late-16th century was, it would seem, a rather dangerous place to be. Lurking in the shadows of that famous spire, creeping

round the cloisters and stalking the stalls was a knife-wielding would-be murderer. Eek, we hear you say. So who was said villain? None other than the cathedral's choirmaster John Farrant, in fact. Documents recently unearthed in the cathedral's library reveal how, on one dark day in 1592, Farrant briefly absented himself from conducting evensong and made his way, knife in hand, to the house of the Cathedral's dean, who had threatened to sack him. Thwarted in his efforts when the terrified cleric locked himself in a room, Farrant then thought better of it, popped his knife away and headed back to complete the service. Remarkably, he appears to have got off scot-free and, what's more, was later appointed to a similar post at Hereford Cathedral. They're made of tough stuff in Hereford.

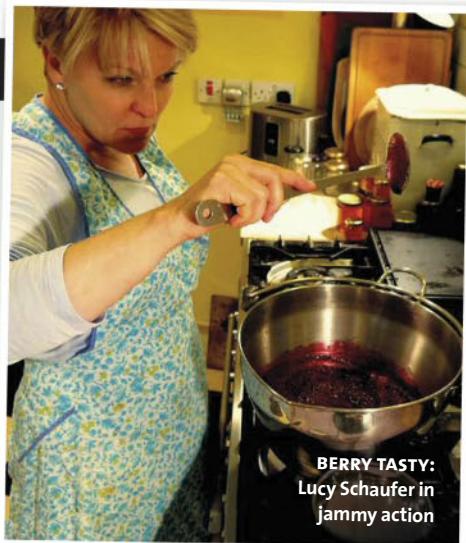
## AFTER HOURS

Musicians and their hobbies

**LUCY SCHAUFER**  
Mezzo-soprano

### JAM MAKING

There are two main periods in the year when I'm making preserves: August and September are full-on for me because that's when the vegetables or fruit are in season, and it is also a good time to get your mincemeat done for next year; and then January is Seville orange time. I've been making jam with my family since I was a kid because my sister married the local farmer and we were always doing stuff. Among the products I make are apricot jam – with their own kernels, because they add a flavour like almonds – plus rhubarb jam with currants and ginger, and a 'good morning' marmalade which is made with grapefruit, blood orange and Seville orange. My husband, Chris, makes his own preserved lemons, and I also do things like mince pies and damson cheese for Christmas. I don't have a garden



BERRY TASTY:  
Lucy Schaufer in  
jammy action

that's big enough for trees, sadly, but I have a brilliant hedgerow along one of the fields in my neighbourhood, and the farmer has no issue with us picking the brambles, rosehips, sloes, damsons and crab apples. I've set up my own store on Facebook now and I'm selling this stuff! But it's not about profit; it's about sharing the plenties of the season.



# TheFullScore

## Farewell to...



BARTÓKIAN:  
Zoltán Kocsis in  
Budapest, 2009

### ZOLTÁN KOCSIS

*Born 1952 Pianist and conductor*

Zoltán Kocsis will be remembered for his brilliance at the keyboard and with the baton in equal measure. A pianist of exceptional ability who excelled in the works of Hungarian composers, he also co-founded the Budapest Festival Orchestra (BFO) with Iván Fischer in 1983 – together, they led the ensemble to worldwide acclaim. Born in Budapest, Kocsis played the piano from a very young age. In 1970, at the age of 18, he won the prestigious Hungarian Radio Beethoven Competition and launched his solo career. Particularly associated with the music of Bartók, whose complete solo piano works he recorded for Philips, he also won awards for his recording of Debussy's *Images*. As a conductor he was similarly feted, particularly at the helm of the BFO, with whom he made many highly rated recordings – again, Bartók featured strongly, this time on Hungaroton. In 1997, he was also made principal conductor of the Hungarian National Orchestra, a post he held until his death.

### Also remembered...

The Scottish tenor saxophonist **Bobby Wellins** (born 1936) was best known for his work with pianist Stan Tracey, most notably on the 1965 album *Jazz Suite Inspired by Dylan Thomas's 'Under Milk Wood'*. As well as playing in Stan Tracey's quartet, he also led his own quartet in the 1970s and '80s.

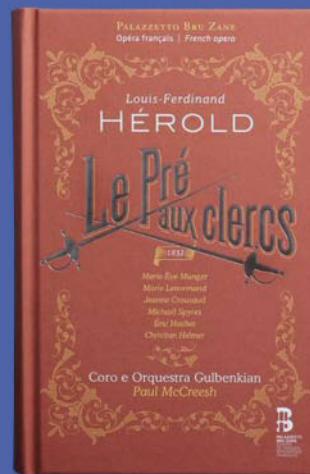
Composer **Peter Reynolds** (born 1958) held the rare distinction of having written the world's shortest opera. Setting a libretto by Simon Rees, Reynolds's *Sands of Time*, which premiered in Cardiff in 1993, has a duration of just three minutes and 34 seconds.

The contralto **Ursula Boese** (born 1928) was a familiar figure at the Bayreuth festival during the 1950s and '60s, appearing in productions of Wagner's *Ring* cycle and *Parsifal*. Also a member of Hamburg State Opera, her studio recordings ranged from JS Bach to Berg and Penderecki.

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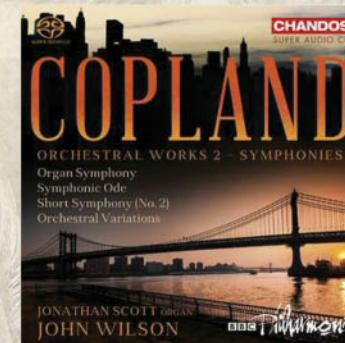
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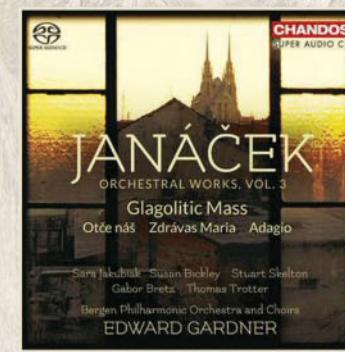
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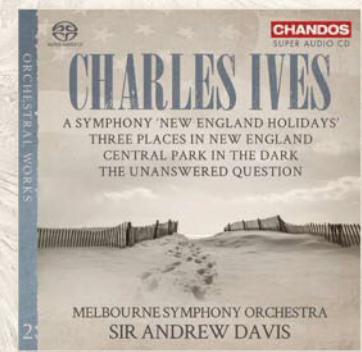
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## The Richard Morrison column

# Has Martyn Brabbins got the mettle to turn the ENO ship around?



The last time I saw Martyn Brabbins was in June, at London's St John's, Smith Square. He was sitting quietly behind me during the interval of a London Sinfonietta concert, and we had a pleasant chat about the musical world. Which would have been entirely unremarkable, except for one thing. The concert contained four fiendishly demanding premieres, it was being broadcast on Radio 3 and Brabbins was not only conducting but presenting it as well.

I remember thinking then what an unsung hero he is. Unassuming, unpretentious, unflappable, genial and a complete professional, he also does a rather nice line in irony. 'I thought all British conductors went to private schools and Cambridge,' he once quipped to me. 'I grew up in a council house in Leicester and went to Goldsmiths College in south London.'

At 57, he must have conducted more difficult premieres and resuscitated more problematic rarities than any other conductor alive. Yet he has seen baton-wagglers with half his talent and a tenth of his experience landing the big appointments, while he seemed doomed to be labelled forever with that most damning of compliments: 'safe pair of hands'.

Well, he's unsung no longer. In October he was appointed music director of English National Opera, with immediate effect. It's by far the biggest challenge

of his career – and that's saying something, because this is a man who has conducted Havergal Brian's mammoth *Gothic Symphony* at the BBC Proms. Yet if I saw him tomorrow I'm not sure whether I would congratulate him on this belated recognition of his talents, or commiserate with him for joining an opera company that, over the past few years, has had a wretched record of managerial coming and goings, plus a punitive £5 million reduction in its annual Arts Council grant and the

the tiller have helped the *Titanic* after it collided with the iceberg?

Well, let's adopt a slightly more optimistic stance, and assume that ENO can be rescued and turned once more into a vibrant, viable operatic 'powerhouse' – to use a word that will evoke memories of its glory days back in the 1980s. It's the music director who must be the true driving force in an opera house, whatever the managerial hierarchy. Does Brabbins have what it takes to lead such a dramatic revival? And

He also works at Deutsche Oper in Berlin and at Frankfurt Oper, where a few years ago he conducted Ildebrando Pizzetti's complex operatic version of TS Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* – a work he longs to bring to the UK, though I'm not sure that ENO could afford to stage it any time soon.

So he has plenty of operas under his belt. But he also knows the orchestral world inside out. Indeed, he started his career as a freelance trombone and euphonium player (I first met him 37 years ago, when he was playing in my dad's brass band). That hard-won practical experience, working his way up from the grass roots, will be important when it comes to convincing the ENO orchestra and chorus that he is on their side.

That's one of his two main tasks, because ensembles with poor morale rarely produce consistently thrilling performances, and if ENO doesn't do that it is doomed. But Brabbins's other essential priority will be to use what resources ENO still has with maximum imagination to produce compelling events, rather than whingeing about the resources it doesn't have. The latter tactic was the downfall of his predecessor.

I think he is an inspired appointment. He achieves excellence, but is pragmatic, too. If anyone can pull ENO from the slough of despond, he can. ■

## Ensembles with poor morale rarely produce consistently thrilling performances

consequent imposition of reduced contracts on its chorus.

Brabbins's immediate predecessor, Mark Wigglesworth, lasted six months before deciding that he disagreed so fundamentally with the strategy set by Cressida Pollock, the chief executive, that he felt compelled to resign. The newly appointed artistic director, an American maverick called Daniel Kramer, has a track record for staging 'provocative' productions that alienate as many punters as they convince. The company still has desperate financial problems, and its workforce is (by all accounts) seriously disenchanted. 'At least Martyn will be a steady hand on the tiller,' a colleague said. True, but would a steady hand on

if so, what must he do to achieve such a miracle?

The first question is more easily and happily answered than the second. When Brabbins was appointed, eyebrows were raised because he has conducted comparatively little opera in this country (his excellent championing of Vaughan Williams's *A Pilgrim's Progress* at ENO in 2012 is usually cited) – but that merely shows how parochial the British media can be. Abroad, he has bags of operatic experience, and in some exalted places, too. Having studied with the great Ilya Musin in St Petersburg, he became Valery Gergiev's assistant and was the first Englishman to conduct at the Mariinsky Opera in half a century.

*Richard Morrison is chief music critic and a columnist of The Times*



# CHORAL HERO

This Christmas, churches and chapels across the globe will echo to the haunting sound of *Lux Aurumque* by Eric Whitacre, a composer and conductor who has got literally thousands of people singing together. *Terry Blain* meets choir music's modern-day superstar

..... PHOTOGRAPHY MARC ROYCE .....

**H**e completely altered the course of my life.' Eric Whitacre is talking about David Weiller, director of choral studies at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and about the scary way in which the course of an entire future can hinge on chance encounters and the decision of a moment.

Whitacre was a raw-boned freshman student out of Reno, Nevada, when he first encountered Weiller, and an unlikely recruit for the university choir. His main interests at the time were the British techno-poppers Depeche Mode and synthesisers, but somehow Weiller got him singing. The first piece on the rehearsal stand was Mozart's *Requiem*, and for Whitacre it was a Damascene moment.

'Like seeing colour for the first time,' is how he remembers it. 'I was regularly moved to tears during rehearsals, crushed by the impossible beauty of the work.' From that day forward Whitacre's course was set. He started taking music seriously, learned to read it, and became 'a choral geek of the highest magnitude.'



NATIONAL ANTHEMS:  
Eric Whitacre, photographed  
for BBC Music Magazine at  
St Monica's catholic church,  
Santa Monica, California



A LITTLE UNDER three decades later, he is a choral composer of the highest magnitude, his music widely performed and recorded, his image as a happy, shiny poster-boy of the 21st-century classical music establishment widely disseminated. How did the remarkable transformation from callow, musically semi-literate undergraduate to confidently self-advertising scion of all things choir-related actually happen?

The process was not, he says, without its moments of doubt and extreme uncertainty. ‘When I started my Masters degree at the Juilliard School in New York I was hugely intimidated. There were people around me who were such spectacularly trained musicians, including my future wife, and I thought “what am I doing here really?”’

In retrospect, though, Whitacre identifies the relative ignorance of his younger self as something of an advantage. ‘I was so naive about the traditions of classical music and the immense baggage that comes with knowing all of that,’ he remembers. With naivety came

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*Fly to Paradise*  
involved a staggering  
8,409 singers

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freedom, and a lack of rule-bound inhibition. By the time he left Juilliard in 1997, he had already published his first choral settings, and *Ghost Train*, the piece for wind band whose runaway success persuaded him that a full-time career in music might be possible.

A wide-eyed openness to new ideas and a willingness to venture well beyond the traditional parameters of classical music-making have continued to characterise Whitacre’s work as a mature composer. Nowhere is this more evident than in the ‘Virtual Choir’ project, an envelope-pushing internet experiment enabling singers from around the globe to submit their audio-visual recording of a voice-part in a piece by Whitacre. These individual submissions are pieced together digitally into a complete performance and put on YouTube.

Four ‘VC’ videos have so far been created, the most recent of which, *Fly to Paradise*, involved a staggering 8,409 singers from 101 countries, and the project as a whole has long since gone viral, amassing over 15 million views and counting. How does Whitacre account for the extraordinary social media impact of his ‘Virtual Choir’ creation?

Although offering the same kind of epiphany for participating singers as he



**HAPPY TOGETHER:**  
Cantores Connexi, brought together at TED2013 for Whitacre's first virtual choir



himself experienced in his first Mozart *Requiem* rehearsal was not, says Whitacre, a conscious aim when he devised the ‘Virtual Choir’ concept, he believes that the effect is ultimately somewhat similar.

‘There was no evangelical sense of “Let’s be the gateway drug for these budding singers”,’ he says. ‘But there’s no question that that seems to be happening now. And as it’s evolved and become that big – we’ve had over 20,000 singers from 115 countries in the

different projects – and there’s this buzz about it, I now feel a real responsibility toward it.’

‘Virtual Choir 5’ is now in development, and aims to take the participatory concept further. ‘With some of the next projects that we’re starting to plan,’ explains Whitacre, ‘there’s a focus on education itself – encouraging singers to learn to sing better, training in sight-reading, using slightly more accessible music. So now it’s becoming a bit more intentional, to bring as many into the fold as possible.’



**GENERAL PAWS:**  
composing at his LA home,  
with the help of Daveed

While aware that some might view the whole ‘Virtual Choir’ phenomenon as contrived and gimmicky, Whitacre insists it never felt that way when he was making it. ‘To be honest, when we were first conceiving it, it was with the innocence of a five-year-old, putting toys together and saying “Will this work?” I honestly thought that no one outside our tiny circle of choir geeks would be remotely interested.’

So why are they interested? What prompts the thousands of ‘virtual choristers’ to sit down at a table in their bedsit, office or living room, click the record button on their computer, and sing along to one of Whitacre’s compositions? For the composer himself, the sense of community that has sprung up among ‘Virtual Choir’ participants is a key factor in the project’s popularity: ‘They’ve reached out to each other, they meet up in person. We’ve got a couple that met on Virtual Choir who are engaged to be married. We’ve had several young people who have died. There’s a young woman who has terminal cancer and is dying, and you can’t imagine the outpouring from all these Virtual Choir members – some of

## A VIEW ACROSS THE POND

*Whitacre on UK and US choral styles*



**TAKING THE BATON:**  
Whitacre conducts his Virtual Youth  
Choir at the opening ceremony of  
the 2014 Commonwealth Games

A FREQUENT CONDUCTOR of choirs in both Britain and the US, Eric Whitacre is ideally placed to assess exactly how the two national choral traditions compare with one another. The takeaway? He finds fascinating differences between UK and American choirs, but resists the notion that one must be necessarily ‘better’ than the other.

‘The most obvious difference to me is the way women singers are trained in England,’ he says. ‘My general impression is that they still are trained in the style of boy sopranos. They sound in a way like “superboys” – that clear, pure tone, no vibrato, with this exquisite attention to blend and this crystalline sound. It’s possibly because church musicians in the UK for 500 years got used to the way boys sounded, and when women were allowed to sing, they were instructed to sound a lot like that.

‘But then within the British tradition the men sing like mature men, with full vibrato and warmth – it’s almost two different parts of the choir in a way. The Americans on the other hand tend to gravitate toward a richer, more full-bodied tone, a little lustier. In American choirs the blend is from top to bottom – a truly homogenous sound.

‘UK choirs tend to be more institutionalised within church and school. In America there seem to be more community choirs, and a spectacular tradition of high school and collegiate choirs: that’s where so much of the juice is happening. In some ways I think the American choral scene trends a little younger; there’s a huge educational component.

‘That being said, I’m endlessly surprised at how many people sing throughout the world; it’s extraordinary. We choir geeks, we have to be the largest, quietest majority.’

them got together and made her own little Virtual Choir for her, with her face in it. It’s extraordinary, so beautiful.’

The Virtual Choir, though hugely popular, has also had its detractors. ‘When it went viral,’ Whitacre recalls, ‘there was a bit of pushback from the choral community initially. And I think part of that came from the idea that this was somehow attempting to replace a traditional choir.’

That is a prospect he finds literally unthinkable. ‘For me, nothing will ever replace the magic that is a group of human beings together in a room, breathing and singing at the same time. To me, that’s the most fundamental demonstration of humanity that we have. To me, the social

media just becomes an extension of the rehearsal space, of the concert hall.’

Whitacre’s experiments at the interface between digitalia and classical music continue. For *Deep Field*, a recent work for orchestra which had its European premiere in the 2015 BBC Proms season, listener involvement was again solicited. Towards the end of the 25-minute piece, a choir begins singing a repeated pair of chords, and the conductor cues audience members to activate the pre-prepared ‘Deep Field App’ they have downloaded previously to their smartphones.

The app emits shimmering noises, suggesting the sense of mystery and wonder in the ‘Deep Field’ images of distant galaxies captured by the Hubble Space Telescope, the ►



**VIRTUAL REALITY:**  
the premiere of *Fly to Paradise*  
(Virtual Choir 4) at Buckingham Palace  
in 2013 with soprano Hila Pitkannen

subject matter of Whitacre's composition. The technical legerdemain in *Deep Field* again sparked allegations of gimmickry and superficiality, one critic decrying the work as a 'long exercise in sonic paint drying.'

Whitacre himself insists that the smartphone idea came more organically than that. 'I was somehow trying to capture musically the magnitude of that deep field image. You look at this thing, and you see these 3,000 galaxies 13 billion light years away, and it brings you to your knees. And so in an attempt to recreate that feeling of wonder and awe, my idea was to submerge the audience in sound, if you will. The inspiration for using the phones came when I was sitting in a traditional classical concert, and they started with the typical "Please make sure your phones are turned off" announcement. I remember in that moment thinking "We're silencing 2,000 video players. Why are we turning these things off? Could they be used?" Then I thought I could design *Deep Field* so that each person was seeing something, and hearing this delicate electronica that would help make this shimmering pool of sound all around them. And it would help to bring people into that image.'

You'll soon be able to judge the results more fully for yourself, as *Deep Field* is set to be

recorded with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Los Angeles Master Chorale, where Whitacre was recently appointed artist-in-residence. It's the latest staging post in a strand of his career that runs parallel to composing – that of performing musician.

One of Whitacre's first assignments with the Los Angeles choir will be to lead a Christmas concert at the Walt Disney Concert Hall

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## 'You see these 3,000 galaxies, and it brings you to your knees'

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in December. His choice of repertoire will have a European, Old World flavour to it, drawing particularly on Whitacre's extensive experience of music making in the United Kingdom. That is where his own choir – the Eric Whitacre Singers – is based, and where he recently completed a five-year stint as composer-in-residence at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge.

'There's an ancientness to the UK Christmas tradition I experienced even doing my own Christmas concerts in London,'

he comments. 'These ancient hymns – plainchant, Praetorius – seem not only new but relevant; it's still in the water somehow. In my experience, Christmas in America is generally much more tied to the 1930s, '40s and '50s. Unless you're in a religious setting it's Bing Crosby and "White Christmas" – which makes me equally sentimental and filled with warmth.'

The glitz, showbiz connotations of the American Christmas will, however, be absent in Whitacre's Los Angeles programme. 'What's very interesting is that the Chorale very specifically don't want me to do that American thing. They've asked that it should be *a cappella*, and have that candle-lit, warm, austere feeling to it. So that's what I'm going to be working on.'

Whitacre's attraction to the more reflective, religiously infused ethos of the European Christmas, and the numinous qualities found in many of his own choral pieces – *Cloudburst*, *Lux Aurumque*, *Sleep* and others – raise a string of inevitable questions, which he is asked frequently. What is his personal belief system? Is it Christian? What accounts for the spiritual impact many listeners experience from his music?

'For me, it's a conversation that requires three Martinis just to get started!' he laughs.

# ERIC WHITACRE

Five must-hear discs



## Light and Gold

Grace Davidson, Stephen Kennedy, Hila Plitmann; Christopher Glynn (piano); The Eric Whitacre Singers, Laudibus, The King's Singers, Pavão Quartet/Eric Whitacre Decca 274 3209

Released in 2010, these are finely polished performances of some of Whitacre's best known works, including the ultra-popular carol *Lux Aurumque*.



## Water Night

The Eric Whitacre Singers, London Symphony Orchestra/Eric Whitacre Decca 279 6323

A fascinating, atmospheric album from 2012 that combines choral and orchestral works. Soloists include cellist Julian Lloyd Webber and Whitacre's wife, the soprano Hila Plitmann.



## The Stolen Child etc

The King's Singers, Concordia Choir/René Clausen Signum SIGCD262

Five Whitacre choral works are heard here alongside those by his contemporaries, ex-King's Singer Bob Chilcott and the American Morten Lauridsen.



## Cloudburst

Polyphony/Stephen Layton Hyperion CDA67543

Recorded in 2006, Polyphony's immaculate Whitacre disc brought the composer's work to UK ears. The recording includes the album's title work, composed when Whitacre was just 22.



## Enjoy the Silence

Eric Whitacre Singers/Eric Whitacre Decca 481 0530 (download)

Whitacre pays homage to his electronica pop heroes in this deft choral arrangement of Depeche Mode's Brit Award-winning single from their 1990 album, *Violator*.



**WRITE ATTITUDE:**  
‘I just focus on the purity of the art form’

‘What I usually come up with is that I’m agnostic, that I simply don’t know. The truth is, at heart I think of myself as a scientist, a sceptic, that I’m looking for evidence. Thus far, metaphysically, I haven’t seen evidence to make me believe, to become a Christian. That said, I’m so gratefully aware of the limitations of my own understanding, of even my daily life, let alone the wonders of the universe. What I do feel I share with people of religious faith is that sense of wonder and awe – that, regardless of whether or not there was a creator, the architecture is profound and exquisite, and sophisticated beyond my understanding. So I think what seems to come naturally when I’m writing music is that shared sense of wonder and awe.’

The vein of existential contemplation in Whitacre’s work is set to continue in two new compositions he is currently preparing: *Sagrada Família*, an unaccompanied choral piece inspired by Gaudí’s extraordinary Roman Catholic basilica in Barcelona; and *The Sacred Veil*, another choral setting of a poem by Whitacre’s friend and longtime collaborator Charles Anthony Silvestri.

Add *Bachianus Americanus*, a new Villa-Lobos-inspired orchestral piece commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra that he is also working on – ‘a very American deconstruction of a Bach piano prelude’, he says – and the picture of the hyper-busy, constantly in-demand composer, musician

and educator is complete. ‘Brand Whitacre’ is a global phenomenon in the world of classical music, and will almost certainly expand further.

Does Eric Whitacre himself ever feel a sense of disconnect between the gleaming, quasi-messianic figure depicted in his press releases and record company photographs – his golden-haired looks saw him signed up by the Storm model agency in 2011 – and the man he is privately, when he wakes up in the morning?

‘I do,’ he replies. ‘It’s a very odd experience sometimes, to walk into a concert hall or a large group of people, and almost be the bearer of this concept of me. What I try

to do in my daily life is to work constantly on a sense of gratitude and humility. And hard work – just focus on the purity of the art form, and hope that everything else then emanates out from that, and retains its sense of authenticity and integrity.’

‘Nothing seems to cut through these days like authenticity,’ he adds. ‘My first experience of singing in a choir, which has stuck with me, was that I felt for the first time part of something larger than myself. I was hearing my true name, and my true name included others – a sense of community, a sense of belonging, in this great sea of humanity. And I’m hoping that part of the reason for the popularity of my work is that people are drawn to that very thing, to a sense of them being part of something larger than themselves.’ ■

**‘Nothing seems to cut through these days like authenticity’**



## THE JAMES NAUGHTIE INTERVIEW

## JOYCE DIDONATO



Whether performing for an audience at a maximum-security jail or asking us to pursue our own inner peace, the American mezzo-soprano is always on the look-out for classical music's humanity

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN MILLAR

**P**icture a dark room in Sing Sing prison in upstate New York, packed with 300 or so hard-boiled inmates, most of them violent criminals – ‘the toughest of the tough’. Rival gang members are being kept apart by guards, plug-uglies are everywhere and the atmosphere is electric. But they’re listening to a performance of arias by Handel and Rossini.

‘It was dark, shadowy and threatening,’ says mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato. ‘I was thinking to myself that the guys on the stage would protect me, but it was nerve-wracking. Then I hear a big, loud voice from the back’ – she puts on a rough New York accent – ‘and it says, “Thank you for comin’ here.”’

This story is the unexpected prelude to her explanation for her latest project, *In War and Peace*, a disc of arias that breaks the usual mould. Soon after we meet, she’s performing the pieces at the Barbican in London. What she learned in Sing Sing confirmed for her, spectacularly, what she already knew and felt, but needed to have reinforced.

She had been invited because the prison has a music programme that provides instrumental classes and tuition in classical composition for men who want it and who show some aptitude. It’s a chink of light in the gloom and their work is performed in front of everyone.

Asked to sing for them, DiDonato decided not to compromise. ‘I said, are you sure you

## A LIFE IN BRIEF



AT THE MET: in Rossini's *La donna del lago*

**Early life:** Born in 1969 in Kansas, DiDonato sang in school musicals and studied to be a music teacher, although opera singing was latterly at the back of her mind.

**Development:** In 1995 she became a Santa Fe Opera apprentice, before entering Houston Grand Opera’s young artist programme.

**Professional career:** DiDonato has sung with many opera companies and orchestras, receiving acclaim for performances such as Elena in Rossini’s *La donna del lago* at the Met. As a recording artist, she has won many awards, among them two Grammys for *Joyce & Tony* and *Diva Divo*.

**Recently:** DiDonato has ventured into film, playing Florence Foster Jenkins in a new documentary about her life, and continues to record and tour extensively.

want opera? I mean I wasn’t going to sing “You’ll Never Walk Alone”. I said that if they wanted opera, I wouldn’t do them down.’

So she sang an aria from *Giulio Cesare*, explaining first what Handel had tried to do. ‘Cleopatra’s a powerful woman with everything she wanted in the world. Suddenly the one man she loved has been killed, and she realises that she’s condemned to grief for the rest of her life. And you’re gonna hear me say *Piangerò...* which means I’m gonna cry. Then in the middle section it changes. She says I may cry for the rest of my life, but when I die I’m gonna come back and I’m gonna make you pay.’

DiDonato knew, of course, that they would understand, and sang Cleopatra’s Act III aria *Piangerò la sorte mia*. ‘I thought to myself,’ she recalls, ‘I’m not going to water this down, I’m going to do this as if I were on stage at the Barbican. And they start screaming out – “you go girl”, “you go get him”, “you make him pay!” – and it became like Shakespeare’s Globe theatre. Interactive. Then it ends. Big cadenza. Silence. You could have heard a pin drop. They got it. They got the emotion. They got the tears. Then they jumped to their feet. They went wild.’

And what did their reaction tell her?

‘That it works and it’s universal,’ she reflects. ‘If you take somebody by the hand and say “don’t be afraid, this is what I’m going to sing” ▶



**MUSICAL STATES:**  
Joyce DiDonato receives a rapturous applause at Carnegie Hall back in October



**MAKING HER MARK: 'music can open the heart'**

'thoughts floating around,' she recalls, 'and I realised that I just couldn't do this. At that moment in time I had to do something different, and I was looking at these other arias that I'd always wanted to record from the Baroque world, talking about war and peace.'

'It jumped off the page at me and I started to explore the idea. I thought – this is the moment to be doing this. At the same time I wanted to put out a very clear, maybe a naive message. By singing these two- or three-hundred-year-old arias, I wanted to show both sides of our humanity: the dark – your ISIS side, if you will – but only because I wanted to show the light. What does utopia look like? Both of these things are possible and both of them we've cycled through over and over again through human history.'

Her purpose wasn't to go back and forth between light and darkness, in confusion, but to try to show the ideal that might be captured by music. 'Everybody asks whether opera is still relevant in the world today. It's the most boring question in the world, but I understand why they ask it. Part of that is our fault in the industry. We present it as "aren't you lucky to be here and witness this spectacle". Well, I'm sitting here looking at the words that Purcell and Handel have set, scenes of horror and woe rising from the depths, and that's what we see on CNN. It's as relevant today as it was back then. It's getting into the guts of opera and showing how it affects us today.'

We are talking in London before the climax of the US presidential election which DiDonato's following with some trepidation. 'I sit at my computer screen and suddenly I see ISIS, Donald Trump and everything else and I start to feel the heaviness,' she says. 'I'm a real optimist, but I start to feel weighted down. I really don't want that. I want to remind myself

about", and then you give it to them, they'll get it.' After Handel, she turned to Rossini, introducing him with a tra-la-la version of the Overture to *William Tell*. Everyone knew it.

Here's what she said: 'OK, you know that. Now this is written by the same guy. It comes at the end of a very long opera. There's been war, and peace has broken out. There are three different men coming after me and I've chosen the one that I love.'

She warned them that they might think the song was over too early, because it sounded as if it was going to stop after a little. But there would be more.

'I said stick with me, it's kinda long... What you need to know is she's happy that peace has come. She's going to sing faster and faster, and higher and higher, to show how happy she is. That's all I told them. Then afterwards I had these spontaneous standing ovations, because they were hearing things that they'd never heard anyone do before. And they went insane. They loved it.'

DiDonato says she's never sung for a more grateful audience, nor been more convinced about the power of music. 'I've never felt more useful, I think, as a performer. I gave them something big that night. It sometimes felt a little bit scary, although I never really felt unsafe. I did think, if anything goes wrong I'm a little bit unprotected here because the

only way out of the auditorium is through the crowd. They kind of rushed me and all of a sudden there were men all around me and there was only one man from Carnegie Hall to help. But their eyes were wide and they were shoving programmes in my face, asking "would you sign this for my daughter?" or "would you sign this for my girlfriend?".

## 'We can see Purcell and Handel's scenes of horror on CNN'

They were astonished and were so happy that I came. "You killed it," they said. "I didn't know any voice could do that."

It's a remarkable story, one that lies at the heart of the project that she's launched with her new recording – and the series of recitals to go with it. *In War and Peace* was prompted by the attacks in Paris in November 2015. She'd been becoming more obsessed by the feeling that if music really did change lives, could she say something more than might come from a traditional recital programme?

'I was sitting at my piano going through these long operatic arias with kind of inane



**LIFE-AFFIRMING:**  
‘we don’t have to join a  
merry-go-round of despair’

that we can choose a different path, and we don't have to join a merry-go-round of despair.'

If this sounds a little simplistic, as well as high-minded, that's because she happily acknowledges that it is. 'Music is the platform where we can open the heart a little bit,' says DiDonato. 'So, if you believe that, you have to do something about it.'

If you look at her website, you'll find her own account of having asked audience a simple question, one that is deliberately bald, even childlike: 'In the midst of chaos, how do you find peace?' One prisoner in Sing Sing gave a long, dense answer, in which he spoke about light and darkness: 'As our hands rise up we see other people in chaos, and find our peace in being models of brokenness.' He was serving a long sentence for murder, and in the composition class had written a duet about the two bullets that had killed his victim.

In putting together the responses to that question, DiDonato places Ruth Bader Ginsburg's answer after his – a prisoner followed by a Justice of the US Supreme Court. 'In print,' says DiDonato, 'they become equal.'

So *In War and Peace* is a means of pursuing that quest, as if she's trying to demonstrate that many more people can be persuaded that inspired music will give you so much

more than a few minutes of high emotion at a concert.

'You can recall that experience,' she suggests. 'They might not remember the name of the song but they'll remember the sound, and the suspension of their lives for five minutes. I've taken them somewhere else.'

The repertoire which has brought DiDonato such success in recent years – with that glorious voice that suggests so much more to come –

## Jenkins was trying to make us cry and feel something'

springs, above all, from her love of the Baroque. 'There's a purity about that period of music, a very clear structure,' she says. 'And when you have a perfect structure, in a building or great musical work, you can look at it and know where you are. Handel is like home to me.'

'The melody is transcending. There's also the artistic freedom for a singer. I'm expected to embellish it. It is expected. And I know that what I'm doing is original. It hasn't been done exactly like this in three or four hundred years

and I get to do something new. Such a privilege and a responsibility. And artistically it's so rewarding – I get to add my voice to the quality of the piece, and that's fulfilling for me as an artist, but I think for the audience it means that even if it's an aria they've heard sung many times before, they're hearing me do it. They're getting to know me, and they know they're hearing something new. The phrasing and ornamentation is mine; and it somehow feels contemporary and modern. There's a sense of discovery in a performance of music like this – where's she gonna take this?'

As with her *In War and Peace* project, DiDonato's always on the look out for ways of creating new kinds of excitement. This month a drama-documentary is released about Florence Foster Jenkins – yet another film, you might be thinking – exploring the life of the singer who couldn't quite do it, but had a bizarrely successful career. And this treatment is rather different from Meryl Streep's portrait.

'How did she get there?' reflects DiDonato. 'We try to fill in some of the gaps. Not presenting her as the world saw her, but going inside her head and presenting her as she saw herself. She thought she was wonderful and sang like a goddess. The only time she realised otherwise was when she couldn't prevent the press coming to that last Carnegie Hall concert – and she read the reviews. That broke her heart and she died five weeks later. But up until then she was quite sheltered.'

Singing unmusically in the style of Jenkins, after a lifetime of training that started in Kansas and then New York many years ago, was obviously difficult for DiDonato. It did, however, bring her an insight from a strange angle into the humanity in music that we've been talking about throughout our conversation, interrupted by beautiful notes, because it's obvious that she can't stop singing, wherever she is and in whoever's company.

'I fell in love with her,' says DiDonato. 'She didn't succumb to any expectations, she broke the rules and she was a feminist, leading her own life. I think – good on you, Florence. In the film we've honoured her. At the end, I broke into tears because I recognised that we'd been laughing at her, but that she wasn't trying to make us laugh. She was trying to make us cry and feel something. With this film I hope we've honoured the love that she had for this. It's more than laughing at somebody. It's deeper than that, and absolutely humane.'

From Sing Sing to Jenkins's famous last concert at Carnegie Hall and the *In War and Peace* recitals, DiDonato is on a musical journey that will recruit many fellow-travellers – and it's a personal quest that she's following with determination and beautiful verve. ■

*'In War and Peace'* is out now on Warner Classics

## EXCLUSIVE CAROL COMPOSED FOR YOU!

# Love came down at Christmas

Our annual tradition of commissioning a carol from a brilliant young composer started in 2014. This year, we've invited *Alexander L'Estrange* to write a setting of his own choosing. Here he introduces his stunning new work

I was delighted to be asked to compose this year's carol for the readers of *BBC Music Magazine*. The poem 'Love came down at Christmas' is classic and Christmassy, and although many composers (including John Rutter) have set these words by Rossetti, no one melody has come to dominate. The words are direct, sincere and expressive; my aim was to provide music that would be a suitable stylistic match. The form is very straightforward: verses 1 and 3 are essentially the same, with a chance for the basses to come to the fore in verse 2 while the sopranos provide an angelic descant. A simple coda begins in unison and brings things to a serene close.

As a jazz musician with a love of harmony (I was briefly banned from singing at New College Choir in Oxford for humming added



FOUR-PART PERFECTION: Alexander L'Estrange

ninths in the last chords of pieces!), the task of creating a harmonically interesting and characterful soundworld within the confines of a four-part, SATB texture is a challenge I always find rewarding. I hope you'll enjoy both the scrunches and the simplicity.

I trust the demo recording, made by me and my wife Joanna Forbes L'Estrange and available to listen to at [www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com), will be helpful. Part-learning MP3s are also available there; you can hear each part singled out with a very quiet backing to help you learn your notes, if that appeals to you. To learn more about L'Estrange's music, visit the Faber website at [www.fabermusic.com](http://www.fabermusic.com). 'On Eagles' Wings', Tenebrae's recording of L'Estrange's music including 'Epiphany Carol' and 'Hodie!', is out now.

### PERFORMANCE NOTES

#### *Alexander L'Estrange's guide to performing his new choral piece*

THE MOST IMPORTANT thing here, as indeed in all choral music, is the clarity and communication of the text. The English language is abundant with consonant clusters and diphthongs which are to be revelled in, not shied away from. If we sing the words as closely as possible to how we would say them, they can be heard and understood. As choral singers and directors, we can too often become overly concerned with precisely where

to place final consonants and pay so much attention to lengthening 'pure' vowels that the resulting sound, while beautiful, can be less meaningful or moving for the listener. To this end, initial consonants (for example, on 'Love') and closed 'm' and 'n's in words such as 'came' and 'sign' must be heard. I have a particular dislike of rolled 'r's in modern English choral music and of sounding the silent 't' in 'Christmas', so try to refrain from these mannerisms when you perform the piece!

Decisions about where to breathe should also be governed by a desire to communicate the meaning of the words. For our demo recording, we chose to breathe with the

commas in bar 5 ('born' and 'God'), but you can decide what suits your performance best. Enjoy the octave leap at the start of the melody and pay attention to your tuning as you come down the scale. Dynamics are subtle but should be effective, particularly the crescendos into bars 6 and 15 and the piano beginning to verse 3.

We hope you'll include 'Love came down at Christmas' in your carol service or concert. Do photocopy the music or download the PDF from [classical-music.com](http://classical-music.com) and share! We'd love to hear/see your performances, so send any audio files or YouTube links to [music@classical-music.com](mailto:music@classical-music.com) and we'll put them on our website.

# Love came down at Christmas

Christina Rossetti (1830–94)

ALEXANDER L'ESTRANGE

**Expressively**  $\text{♩} = c.56$

SOPRANO  
ALTO

TENOR  
BASS

*mf* 1. Love came down at Christ - mas, *mp* Love all love - ly,  
*p* 3. Love shall be our to - ken, Love be yours and

*4*

Love Di - vine, Love was born, was born at Christ - mas,  
love be mine, Love to God, to God and all men,

*poco rall.* **Last time jump** **to Coda**  $\emptyset$

1. gave the sign.  
3. gift and sign.

Star and An - gels gave the sign, gave the sign.  
Love for plea and gift and sign, gift and sign.

1. gave the sign.  
3. gift and sign.

## EXCLUSIVE NEW CAROL LOVE CAME DOWN AT CHRISTMAS

2

10 *più f* Ah ————— *mf cresc.* ah —————

2. Wor - ship we the God - head, Love in - car - nate,

*più f* *mf cresc.*

13

*mp*

wor - ship, wor - ship

Love Di - vine,

Wor - ship we,

wor - ship we our Je - sus,

wor - ship we our Je - sus,

*mp*

Coda

A musical score for voice and piano. The vocal line starts with 'Love came down at Christ mas,' followed by a repeat sign and 'Christ mas.' The piano accompaniment consists of simple harmonic chords. The vocal part includes dynamic markings 'mf' and 'mp warm' and performance instructions 'A tempo' and 'rall.'. The score is in common time, with a key signature of one sharp.

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**STEINWAY & SONS**



**I**t's Christmas morning. The church bells are ringing and you're dreaming of all those presents waiting under the tree. But when you wake up, you discover that you're still at school and there's plenty of work to be done. While the rest of us unwind in the bosom of our families for the festivities, for the trebles of Westminster Abbey Choir, Christmas means business as usual. This is the busiest time of the year for a choral institution that has been at the heart of ceremonial life in London for almost half a millennium. The 30 choirboys, between the ages of eight and 13, have to eat, sleep and rehearse intensively on site at the Abbey school over Christmas for a series of liturgical undertakings starting with the traditional Service of Lessons and Carols on

23 December, progressing through Midnight Mass and the Great Service of Christmas Day. They are only released from their duties after their usual 3pm evensong, when their parents can finally whisk them home for

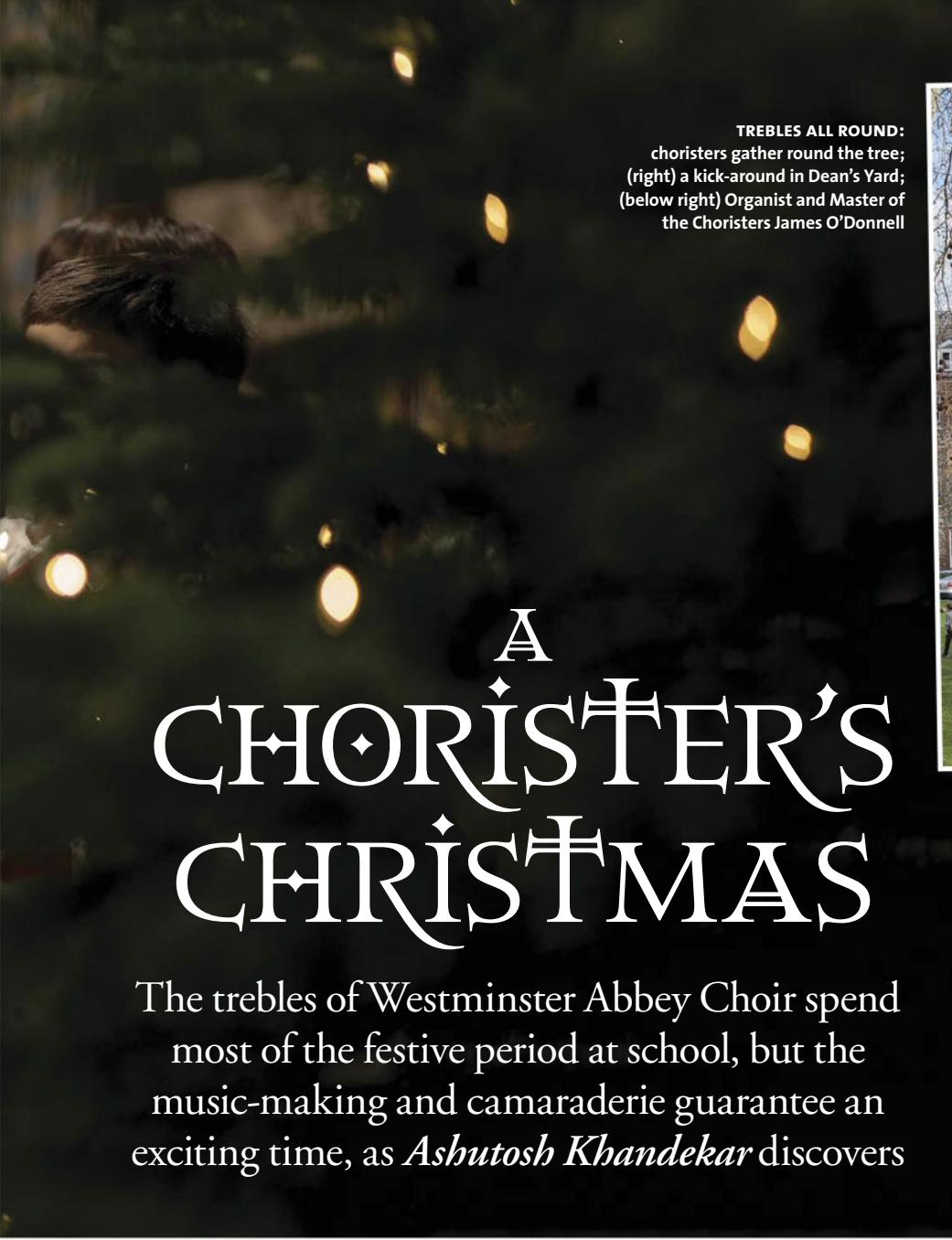
also Master of the Choristers (a post first held by the composer and dramatist William Cornish in 1479). It's an unseasonably balmy October day when I meet O'Donnell in his office in Dean's Yard, a green oasis tucked

## IT TAKES RIGOUR AND DISCIPLINE TO THRIVE IN THE ABBEY ENVIRONMENT

turkey with all the trimmings and a well-earned break.

James O'Donnell presides over musical traditions that have their origins in the late 14th century, and first became institutionalised under Elizabeth I. He is the Abbey's 29th Organist since 1559, and

behind the Abbey and a tranquil setting for Westminster Abbey Choir School. Perhaps it's the warm sunshine bathing the orderly paperwork on his desk, but Christmas seems a long way from O'Donnell's thoughts. 'The thing about the choir,' he explains, 'is that we sing eight services a week throughout the year.'



# A CHORISTER'S CHRISTMAS

The trebles of Westminster Abbey Choir spend most of the festive period at school, but the music-making and camaraderie guarantee an exciting time, as *Ashutosh Khandekar* discovers

We do look ahead to things, but we're used to dealing with the music quickly and using our time to prepare things that are close at hand. We're doing Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* at the beginning of December, so we'll be starting to rehearse that shortly; but the meat-and-drink Christmas repertoire we put together in a matter of weeks running up to the actual Christmas period.'

Westminster Abbey has the only choral foundation in the country where every single one of the boys, all borders at the Choir School, participates in the daily round of ecclesiastical services, as well as singing in great occasions of state, from royal weddings to memorial services for the great and the good, and grand ceremonies marking historic events. Each academic year, there is an intake

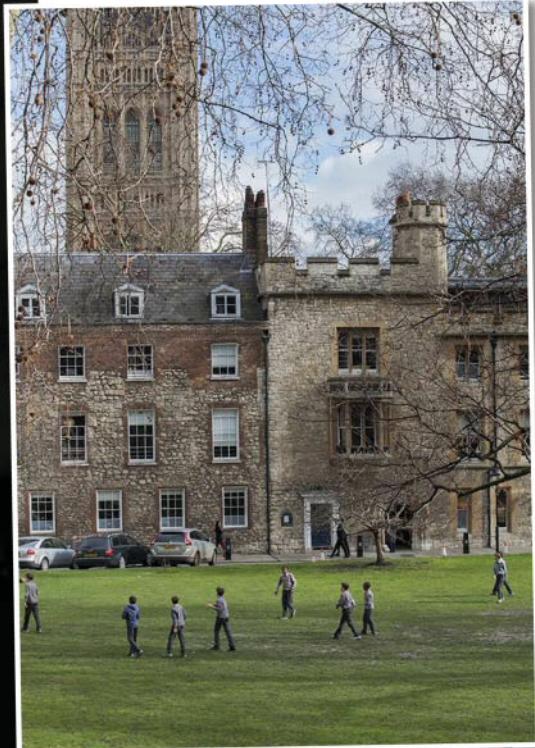
of around nine boys aged eight, who are taken on as probationers, initially sitting in on services to learn their trade. A year later, these boys become part of the singing choir. It is only in his last year or two, before leaving the choir at the age of 13, that a singing boy becomes one of the ten fully fledged choristers of Westminster Abbey, distinguished in the school by their red ties.

A chorister's life is demanding. Weekday rehearsals start at 8:15am and, before evensong at 5pm, boys have a full day of academic school to fit in. It takes rigour and self-discipline to thrive in an environment like this. How do O'Donnell and his team decide that a boy is right for this kind of life? 'It's a difficult thing to assess someone aged seven,' admits O'Donnell. 'We look at the

overall picture of a child who we think will respond positively to this environment, who is interested in it, who has a voice without any inherent technical difficulties, who responds to music well – which is obviously important. But we're not looking for any previous training or even experience.'

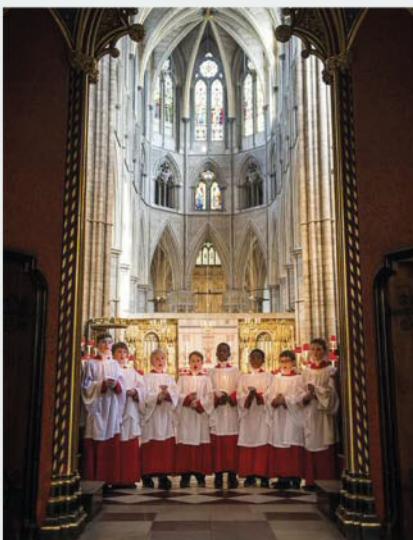
Does it take a pushy parent to ensure that an applicant has the right sort of ambition to succeed? 'We're not auditioning the parents,' insists O'Donnell. 'Of course, we talk to parents, but most importantly, we're looking at what's right for the child and what's right for us. We take our time with the process of selection because we would not want somebody who isn't suited to this life. There's no checklist or spreadsheet with a formula to give you the right result. If a civil servant were ►

TREBLES ALL ROUND:  
choristers gather round the tree;  
(right) a kick-around in Dean's Yard;  
(below right) Organist and Master of  
the Choristers James O'Donnell



## AN ABBEY CHRISTMAS

*A run-down of this year's services*



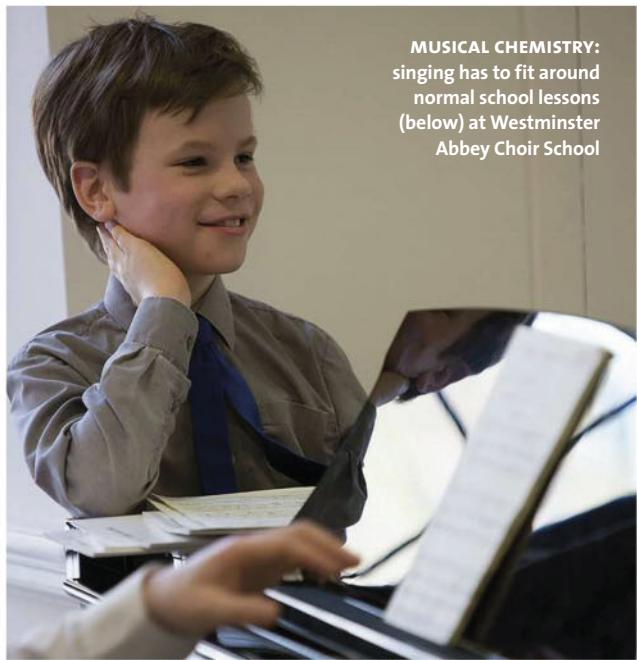
GLORIOUS ARCH: the Abbey's Victorian quire

This year, Christmas at Westminster begins on the 27 Nov with an Advent Liturgy by candlelight. On 1 Dec, the Abbey Choir and St James's Baroque will perform JS Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, conducted by James O'Donnell. The choir's annual Christmas Concert on 15 Dec promises a wide range of festive choral works alongside traditional carols for all to sing. On 18 Dec, Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols* is the centrepiece of the Abbey's Christmas Meditation, prefaced by a reading of The Christmas Proclamation. On Christmas Eve, families can hear the Nativity story and join the blessing of the crib at the 12pm Crib Service. There will also be the Service of Lessons and Carols at 4pm, before Midnight Mass at 11.30. The main service on Christmas Day begins at 10.30am, and the day ends with choral evensong at 3pm. *Tickets may be required for concerts/services during Christmas. Visit [westminster-abbey.org](http://westminster-abbey.org)*

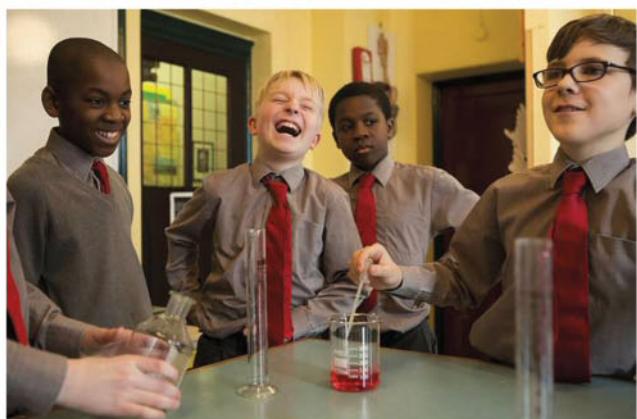
to be assessing the process of selection here, I think they'd find it most unsatisfactory.'

Daniel Cook, Westminster Abbey's Sub-Organist, auditions potential choristers alongside O'Donnell and is a keen observer of family dynamics: 'If a child is really keen but the parents are not, that can be just as bad as the other way round. Children often have powerful gut feelings about these things and I've known some boys who have to persuade parents who may initially be reluctant – that usually works fine. On the other hand, a lot of boys here have fathers who are choristers and want their sons to have the same experience.'

These days, even an institution as august and prestigious as Westminster Abbey



MUSICAL CHEMISTRY:  
singing has to fit around  
normal school lessons  
(below) at Westminster  
Abbey Choir School



has to try harder than ever to recruit the best talent: 'In the old days, church choirs around the country ensured that there was a steady stream of boys who were immersed in a culture of music and singing from a young age,' says the Abbey Choir School's headmaster, Jonathan Milton. 'Nowadays, we

a high price tag. They would, however, be wrong, as Milton explains: 'The Abbey pays 80 per cent of the fees, so most parents are asked to pay a balance of around £7,000 a year for full boarding. But I have to emphasise that money is no bar to sending a boy here. There are a range of scholarships that we reserve

## 'ON CHRISTMAS DAY, OUR PARENTS COME IN WITH PRESENTS FOR US'

need to get the message out that a chorister's life is one that strikes an ideal balance between superb academic training and tremendous creative fulfilment – and is open to anyone.'

With small classes of around seven offering plenty of individual attention, and excellent facilities for borders, many people might think that the Choir School offers the sort of intensive private education that comes with

for any boy who we think will grasp the opportunities we offer.'

Boarding is a necessity given the full schedule of rehearsals, services, concerts, recordings and touring that each year brings for the Abbey Choir. And being away from family life at Christmas is perhaps the most heart-wrenching proviso of all for parents contemplating this type of education for their sons. Orlando is Head Chorister at



**SONGS OF PRAISE:**  
James O'Donnell  
rehearses the boys in the  
song school; (above right)  
in full service regalia



and I've incorporated a lot of these new carols here in our services at the Abbey.'

What, I ask O'Donnell, makes a good piece of Christmas music? 'I suppose we think of Christmas as being jolly and celebratory, but I think some of the best Christmas pieces are mysterious and numinous – they cut the tinsel and lights away and leave us to experience a more contemplative aspect of Christmas that lies at the very heart of Christian worship.'

Daniel Cook, who will be in the Abbey organ loft for much of the festive period, has his own views on how to make Christmas special: 'I do try to sound a bit more effervescent than usual,' he says. 'One of my goals at Christmas is to see if I can pull out a few stops that will make James smile unexpectedly.' 'That's a tough one!', O'Donnell concedes.

Entertainment and fun is part of the Christmas mix, but from the Advent Carol Service on 27 November through to Christmas Day, O'Donnell's focus is on fulfilling the needs of a Christmas liturgy as well as infusing the Abbey with a mixture of musical splendour and spiritual contemplation. He hopes that the boys and the 12 professional lay clerks in the Abbey Choir will be fully engaged in what is, in essence, an important liturgical task in the ecclesiastical calendar: 'I don't just want the choir processing to the stalls and singing what's in front of them without thinking about what it means. They have to know what they're doing, why they're doing it and to understand as much about the music and its context as they can.' He adds that even for the youngest of boys, singing at the Abbey at Christmas is acknowledged as a real privilege. 'If any boy misbehaves at any time of year, the worst punishment I can threaten them with is to say that they won't be able to sing with us at Christmas. That brings them back into line immediately!' ■

Westminster Choir School. He is preparing for his final Christmas at the Abbey this year, having already won a place to Eton in 2017. He's keen on Classics and takes his responsibilities in the choir very seriously, though he tells me that in spite of singing in a Christian context for five years, he's yet to be convinced that God exists. 'I decided to opt out of confirmation classes – it's not something I feel ready to commit to yet,' he explains, showing a thoughtfulness beyond his years. I asked him if being away from home at Christmas had been difficult: 'I think some of the younger boys do get a bit homesick, but we look after each other. There's an emphasis here on making sure we're well taken care of, and everyone makes a special effort at Christmas.'

Orlando explains that Christmas is very different from the usual school routine: 'You're in the school building, but it doesn't feel like school. We have lots of free time, and you're with your friends so there's lots of table tennis when we're not singing. The school looks very

decorative – there's a great tree and we decorate our cubicles. We bring decorations from home, so it all feels very festive. On one of the evenings we go to a play, and on Christmas Day our parents come in with presents for us. There's also a present from the headmaster, which we can choose on Amazon ourselves.'

What about the music, I wonder? 'It's an incredibly important part of what Christmas means to me,' says Orlando. 'Although I do get a bit bored of *O Come, All Ye Faithful*. It's good to try new things.'

James O'Donnell is faced with the same difficulty of making sure that the 1,000-year-old traditions of Westminster Abbey are well served at Christmas, and that popular expectations (such as singing *O Come, All Ye Faithful* at every opportunity) are met, while at the same time bringing new, stimulating material to the table. 'The annual new commissions from King's College, Cambridge have been a vital part of the renewal of Christmas music traditions in this country,

# INCREDIBLE TALENTS

Think you know your composers? Think again. As a festive treat, *Duncan McCoshan* invites you to meet five geniuses that history has left out in the cold

**W**e all know who the titans of classical music are. But for every ‘big cat’ there exists a thousand domesticated moggies. Who were they, these whippersnappers of the stave, these half-pint Puccinis and bantam Beethovens? They are a group of composers unknown even to *Grove’s Dictionary of Music* – shadowy figures lost in the dusky recesses of time. However, they are not completely enveloped in darkness, and it has been possible to sketch them in a little detail – largely by holding up a candle and squinting a lot. Manuscripts have been uncovered in dusty vaults, drawers have been rifled, archivists from Avignon to Murmansk have been buttered up, and a tentative picture of a handful of these figures emerges...

### Frank Barnstaple (1873-1939)

Frank Barnstaple was born to not entirely respectable lower-middle-class parents who ran a small taxidermy business in Chipping Camden. The peculiar atmosphere of deceased fauna made a deep impression on the young, and acutely sensitive, Barnstaple who later wrote to composer Mathers Colclough that ‘the very air was redolent of inanimation’ (see *Stuffed badgers are my muse: the letters of Frank Barnstaple*). This inanimation would lead to a static quality in his own music.

From a disused workshop just off the High Street, Barnstaple first learnt to make music

on his mother’s dilapidated harmonium, an instrument that sat between a pair of stuffed gazelle: ‘Those stuffed ruminants were my first audience, their glassy, indifferent stare haunting my every effort at composition.’

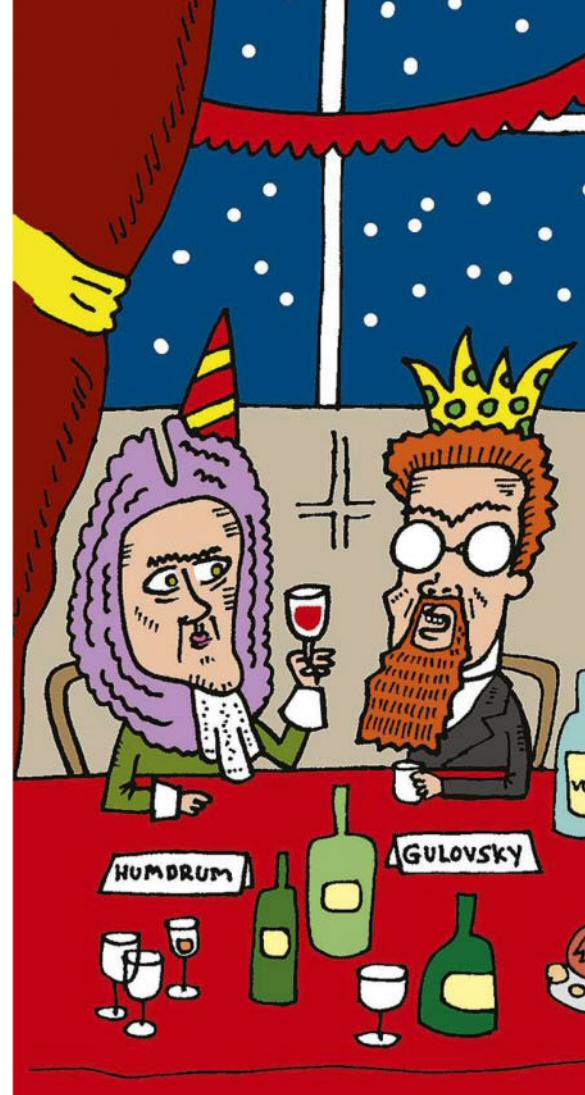
His father was of a morbid disposition but his mother was vivacious and musical. Frank grew up with both parental traits, vivacity inevitably giving ground to morbidity in later life. His mother would play hymns on

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**‘This son of the Cotswolds is our very own Erik Satie!’**

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the harmonium and snatches of folk songs, performing with ‘a splay-fingered intensity that bordered on the demonic – like Scriabin in a frock’. And when the young Frank showed an aptitude on the instrument, she threw all of her considerable drive and ambition into nurturing his talent. He took lessons, played in the town band and church and started composing. His first piece clearly bore the stamp of the family business – it was entitled *Adagio*



for stuffed marmoset and wind ensemble – and was premiered at the Chorlton-cum-Hardy Festival in 1892. Frank was just 19. The critics were just confused. A visit to Paris followed and his quivering spirit was ravished by the beguiling enchantments of French music. His next piece, *Des peluches* ('The stuffed animals'), subtitled 'a jeu d'esprit for bicycle bell, a brace of pheasant and a pensive shrew', brought him to the attention of Harcombe Smint, music critic for the *Evesham Gazette*, who declared that 'this son of the Cotswolds is our very own Erik Satie!'

But success did not follow and he drifted into obscurity, composing in a shabby potting shed in Deptford. His work became increasingly morbid and static, resulting in his extraordinary final composition, the unsettling *Sarabande for a dead otter*.  
**Recommended recording:**  
*Inanimate Spaniels: The Music of Frank Barnstaple*  
 The Matlock Players/Horace Wainscot Otter Music 2465





## Osip Serafimovich Gulovsky (1834-69)

Born in Ekaterinburg to a father obsessed by the Byzantine machinations of his job in the Tsarist bureaucratic service (the Department of Samovar Permits) and a mother who spent her days reclining on an ottoman, drinking *kvass* and recalling the days of Napoleon's invasion, OS Gulovsky overcame every obstacle in his path to becoming one of Russia's most forgotten composers. Neglected by his parents, he found comfort in the family piano. On discovering the folk tune *Prekrasnyj troika, prekrasnyj malen'kiy troika* ('Lovely troika, lovely little troika') he would play it for hours on end. The servants complained. Neighbours complained. Passing serfs complained. Driven to distraction, his parents decided on drastic action: the piano must go... along with Osip. Both were given away to the Duchess Klatkinsy, a distant relative.



The Duchess was under the spell of her piano teacher, the magnetic but despotic YY Dologub. His uncompromising and outlandish methods were most singular: strength was built up by playing Bach's *Art of Fugue* with rashers of bacon wrapped around the fingers, rigidity of posture was maintained by executing Beethoven's *Waldstein* Sonata while balancing a samovar on the head. The young Gulovsky made great strides with composition: etudes, mazurkas, waltzes, ballades and scherzos all gushed from his pen ('All of them of the most startling mediocrity', was Glinka's stark opinion). And then, after a meeting with Balakirev in 1866, he attempted larger orchestral pieces that showed a penchant for insistent rhythms, cymbals and the melancholic nasal meanderings of the cor anglais. The nationalistic feelings that permeated Balakirev's compositions also imbued much



of Gulovsky's own work, notably in such pieces as *Prelude written on the banks of the extraordinarily beautiful Iset River that flows through the magnificent city of Ekaterinburg* (Op. 6) and the symphonic poem *The bigness of the steppe fills the heart with longings indescribable* (Op. 19). But fellow composers were harsh in their judgements: 'Trash. Not so much compositions as compost-itons,' Borodin punned clunkingly.

Things turned nasty in the winter of 1869 when, having been drinking heavily in a St Petersburg tavern, Gulovsky became involved in a brawl with the group of composers known as The Five: Balakirev was bashed with a balalaika, Borodin punched in the mouth, Cui kicked in the shin, Rimsky-Korsakov bitten on the elbow and Musorgsky put in a head lock. Gulovsky fled, but as he sped through the forests east of the city his troika was overtaken by wolves. The next morning his remains were discovered by a gamekeeper of the Duchess Klatkinsy – his severed right hand clutching a set of variations on 'Lovely troika, lovely little troika'.

**Recommended recording:** *The Soulfulness of our Great Emptinesses and other works* Ekaterinburg Philharmonic/Evgeny Minsky Russiphonic 456 654

## Theophilus Frescobaldus Humdrum (1685-1774)

Born in Lübeck. His father was an itinerant organ-grinder who, in 1690, lost both arms in a game of cards. Thereafter he turned the handle of the organ with the aid of a set of sturdy cork dentures and took to the bottle.

Theophilus helped his father and was known as 'Die Affenleierkasten' ('the organ grinder's monkey'). The pennies that he picked up out of the gutter were spent on music lessons. He was beaten regularly with a crumhorn and it was this, he said, that gave him his remarkable feeling for rhythm. One day, with old Humdrum slumped in a drunken stupor, the Margrave of Bad Klumpen happened to pass. Seizing the moment, Theophilus started to play a

set of variations on the Bad Klumpen national anthem 'Gott, gib uns eine gute Ernte von Ruben' ('God, give us a good harvest of turnips'). The Margrave was so taken with it that he made him Kapellmeister on the spot, with the stipend of 90 pfennigs a week and all the turnips he could eat.

Humdrum's first commission was a military piece – a rousing march tune for the Margrave's beloved

Guard. But the Margrave laid down one unusual stricture: it was to be a solo piece, as his mistress, Violenza dalla Piccola, a Milanese courtesan with a fondness for the bassoon, was to have a starring role at the head of the Guard as it went into battle. Working at white heat, Humdrum produced his masterpiece: 'Sieg, Sieg, bringt das Fagott uns den Siegl' ('Victory, victory, the bassoon will bring us victory!'). It was premiered at the battle of Stocklesdorf (3 June 1702), during the Fourteenth War of the Wigs. The Margrave, with Humdrum at his side, watched as the morning mists rolled away and the Guard advanced. At its head was Violenza, accoutred with a set of huge wings – the wings of Victory. Within 40 paces of enemy lines, alas, her cadenza was cut short by a withering fire. And with it went the fortunes of Theophilus Frescobaldus Humdrum.

Sacked, he spent the rest of his life writing hack pieces for minor European royalty, his gifts diminishing as his patrons grew shabbier. His later career has been called 'the longest *diminuendo* in Baroque music'.

#### **Recommended recording:** Coffee

Tafelmusik from the Court at Bad Klumpen  
The Assembly of Wind/Heinrich Pfut  
Deutschenhistorischeschalplatten 222

#### **Melchizedek Pottes (1593-1653)**

'His gifte at Musicke outshone the very sunne/Without his heaven-sent tinkling what would we all have done?' So wrote the poet Lemastus Porridge, a lifelong friend of Melchizedek Pottes. The only son of Devonshire 'small gentry', Pottes was encouraged by his indulgent parents from an early age: at four he was adept on the sackbut (and took pleasure in disturbing fishermen 'with great rasping puffs'), though his 'trew delight' was to play on the virginals.

Falling out of a tree while practising the dulcimer resulted in a blow to the head, a new-found ability to extemporise, and the urge to play 'for the sheepe of the fields and the birdes of the air'. And so servants would lumber across the water meadows carrying the virginals, Pottes trotting behind carrying his 'playing stool'. Here he would sit and improvise melodies. The sheep were clearly beguiled, 'for they didst form a circle around the young master whilst he didst play most divertingly; all the whiles looking up at the sky as if for Divine Inspiration'. His first



known composition, the *Pavan for a Milke White Ewe*, is touched with the flights of fancy and exquisite melancholy that mark so much of his work.

Pottes now passes into obscurity before appearing in the records of Llandaff Cathedral as 'that most eccentric master of Musicke mister Potes [sic]'. The Civil War saw the cathedral sacked by Parliamentarian troops in 1647 and, outraged, Pottes offered himself to the monarchist cause. Appointed 'sacqueboutier Royall' of the Prince's navy, he was present at various 'sea brawles', making a name for himself 'hanging in the very rigging and Blowing alltimes with great gusto'. From this period date his *Begone, foul Roundheads, begone!, Come sackbutt, Puff away yon naughty rebels!, and Blow, blow ye brassy braggart.*

## Pottes made a name for himself, 'blowing with great gusto'

Deeply disturbed by the turmoil of his times ('This Warre hath dealt me many hard knockes'), he retired to Devon and sequestered himself at the battered family seat. He seems to have written little music, but there is one final piece, the sprightly and deeply affecting *Galliard for a long wool sheep*. Sometimes he could be seen sitting in the meadows, once again playing the virginals to a bemused flock.

**Recommended recording:**  
Musicke doth Delight Mine  
Lugholes: pieces for sackbut and virginals.  
The Consort of Scrapey Tunefullness/Mark Priggins *Agnus Pro Cena* 969999

#### **Jean-Jacques Sonneur (1820-44)**

As citizens of Paris fled the Place de la Concord during a rainstorm in the autumn of 1841, one figure stood alone staring at a cow. This was a moment of epiphany for Jean-Jacques Sonneur, without doubt the shortest

composer in 1840s France ('five foot four – and that was standing on a piano stool!', jested the Belgian tuba virtuoso Guillaume Plonck). Sonneur was a struggling composer writing reams of predictable salon music; but that day on the Place he was 'thunderstruck by the sound of a cow bell – its dull tinkle muffled by the rain. Such a simple sound! But it gave me a frisson of unimagined delight'. Sonneur persuaded the dairyman to sell his beast and it became 'La vache d'inspiration' ('The inspirational cow'). Ever the Anglophilic, he named her Buttercup.

Rushing home, Sonneur managed to get the cow up eight flights of creaky stairs and into the confined space of his garret. While Buttercup helped herself to the contents of his window box, Sonneur started to pen some of the most inspired music of the entire 19th century – but entirely for cow bells. Cow bells of all shapes and sizes. And only cow bells. But who cannot admit to a tingle of excitement on hearing the opening bars of the *Prelude for a herd of Friesians* or the closing passages of the *Vaches dans un brouillard?*

These works are on a chamber scale, but before long Sonneur was composing symphonies, tone poems and opera. He showed the score of his one-act opera *Buttercup: un opéra pour troupe au laitier* (Buttercup: an opera for dairy herd) to Berlioz, who admired its intricate scoring but said that he could not help – although he did place an order for three pints of milk. Dejected but determined, Sonneur became set on the idea of a move to Switzerland: home of the cow bell. In the autumn of 1844 he and Buttercup travelled on foot, crossing the border during a snowstorm – a moment that inspired his strikingly impressionistic *Neige, passe montagne et mamelles gelées* (Snow, mountain pass and frozen udders), a work later much admired by Mahler.

Cow and owner were impoverished but happy: while Buttercup chewed the cud, Sonneur hunkered down on his milking stool and composed. And then tragedy struck.

On 9 May 1844, Buttercup was approached by an amorous bull. The composer intervened. There were words and snorts, a mêlée of hooves and Gallic epithets, and Sonneur was gored to death. A simple granite cow bell marks the spot where he fell. ■

**Recommended recording:**  
Les vaches et les cloches  
The Campanologists of  
Carcassonne, dir. farmer Gaston  
Tintement Suite Moosique 345





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# If I had £10 million...

In the spirit of Christmas, we take ten leading classical musicians, give them a massive financial windfall and ask them how they'd spend it!

EARLIER THIS YEAR, we reported on Saffron Hall, the new concert hall set in the grounds of a comprehensive school in Essex (see August 2016 issue). Funded to the tune of £10m by an anonymous donor, it has proved an enormous success, attracting world-class musicians who play in front of sell-out audiences – whoever said donor is, he is surely now smiling as he reflects on a £10m very well spent.

All of which got us thinking, if we had £10m to spend on something classical music-related, what we would do with it? A BBC Music Magazine Symphony Orchestra, perhaps, to help us through deadline week? Now that *would* be nice...

However, much more interestingly, how would leading musicians – the very people you might see performing in Saffron Hall – use this substantial pile of cash? We asked 10 of them just that, and here's what they had to say...

**Tasmin Little** *violinist*



I would like to go around the world to do 80 concerts in 80 days! We'd have a travelling group of fantastic musicians and the idea would be, first of all, to go to lots of different countries – and to far-flung places in particular – to play music to people who haven't had an opportunity to experience live music before. We take the power of music for granted in our profession because it's how we've spent our lives, but it's easy to forget that hearing beautiful music live, particularly for the first time, can be an overwhelming experience. It would, though, also be a massive cultural exchange, whereby local musicians or people who play indigenous music would take part, so there would be a real feeling that music connects us all.

**Sir James Galway** *flautist*



Musicians in bands like U2, the Beatles or Pink Floyd all learnt theory at school. They can all write and compose, so I'd use some of the money to teach classical music at a school, and I'd run a flute class. I'd also like to support my class in Switzerland, which we always need money for. It is open to players of every standard, from all over the world, all of whom need a bit of help. We had four players from South Africa last year, and one of them had a flute that defied description: it was falling to bits. So I gave him a flute. These kids are gifted – you can't turn away from that. You've got to do your best to help the gift mature.

**Ailish Tynan** *soprano*



I would set up an opera company in Ireland that would nurture young Irish talent, be at a very high level and which would involve the community. £10m sounds like a lot of money but it probably wouldn't go that far, so my most important thing

would be to get the right people in place to run it and keep the money coming. Most places that are really successful have fabulous people at the helm. The initial bulk of the money would go on a venue, which I would love to be a proper place open all year round. It would be a platform for Irish people to come and hear our Irish singers, and bring a regular flow of opera singers through Ireland.

### Christophe Rousset harpsichordist and conductor



My dream is to present and conduct French opera in Covent Garden every year, just to show that French opera is not only Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* or Bizet's *Carmen*. We have a lot more, especially from the 17th and 18th centuries. It's an enormous heritage. It would be the opportunity to let English audiences hear masterpieces from the French repertoire, starting with Lully, and then moving to Rameau – though not *Les Indes galantes* or *Castor et Pollux*, but more unknown titles – and then forwards. France was very rich and spent a lot of money on opera, with lots of decorations, a big choir and orchestra, and dance. People might know about these operas but they rarely get to see or hear them.

### James Rhodes pianist



I'd begin by getting myself a Steinway B piano, so that would be me taken care of. After that, I'd spend it on a series of full-page advertisements in the national press shaming the government over music education and barraging them with statistics. This would be in the hope that millions would see, day after day after day, that, despite the promise years ago that every child would given the opportunity to learn an instrument and then progress to the next level of excellence if they want to, it simply hasn't happened. Ours is



FUNDED PHILHARMONICS: Essex's Saffron Hall, financed by a wealthy patron

the land of Elgar, Britten and, for that matter, Elton John, so if we're cutting off music education at grass roots, it really is something to be ashamed of.

### Tine Thing Helseth trumpeter



I would build my own culture house where musicians and artists from different genres could be given the artistic freedom to create whatever they like. It would be a melting pot with no boundaries, a place where the audience never knows what to expect! I would love it to be in my hometown of Oslo, in the area where I live, with a view of the sea. The entire building could be used for performance, with different-sized venues, rehearsal rooms, art studios and a roof terrace for outdoor craziness! The interior would be an ongoing exhibition for artists – using walls, floors, ceilings, you name it. Like life, the venue would always be changing and evolving.

### Roxanna Panufnik composer



I would spend the £10m on childcare grants for struggling self-employed musicians. Childcare in the UK is cripplingly expensive, and it's particularly hard if you don't earn a regular salary. People think that, because you're a creative

musician, it's fine – you're at home and you can look after the children. But you simply cannot entertain small children or babies while you're trying to create something. I remember sitting at the piano with one of mine in a little bouncy chair next to me, smiling, making little noises and trying to interact with me. You can't just turn round, smile back and say something, or shake their rattle – it just doesn't work. To give somebody the opportunity of having, say, a year of full-time childcare would help their career – and their financial security.

### Nicholas Daniel oboist



I'd use the money to help organisations that do a great job already, but that need more. So, £3.75m to the Chineke! Foundation to help them encourage black and minority ethnic children to take up instruments and come to classical music. Then I'd give £250,000 to Yr Obo Teithio, who do wonderful work identifying interested young musicians and buying them oboes, plus I'd buy a recorder and a music reading book for every UK primary schoolchild. I'd give £1m to the Dartington International Summer School, and another £1m to Opera North to give refugees the chance to tell their stories through opera. I'd use £500,000 to fund new oboe commissions and, more selfishly, fund recordings of the hundreds

of pieces that have been written for me over the last 35 years. The last £2.75m would establish a new fund solely to promote British composers – we're currently sleeping through a renaissance where we have so many great composers, yet little public awareness of it.

### Chi-chi Nwanoku double-bassist



I would instigate a national programme, so that every child in UK state schools received exactly the same access to music as they do in private schools. I'd help get the ball rolling by having a Chineke! Foundation tour bus/pop-up concert hall that would take Chineke! senior and junior orchestras to every corner of the UK, playing wonderful, life-affirming music. Chineke! is not just for black and minority ethnic musicians: it's in all our interests, and I believe we will all benefit from a more diverse inclusion in the arts.

### Julian Lloyd Webber cellist



If you've got so much money, it has to be put into music education in schools, which is in a terrible state. I don't think we are using technology enough, and would use the huge resource we have now in YouTube – which has wonderful performances by people like Horowitz, Rostropovich, Oistrakh, and great conductors like Svetlanov and Barbirolli – and send passionate musicians into schools to talk about the performances. No compromise, no dumbing down – simply play the most sensational, passionate performances by the greatest artists. I think children respect that approach. Get really top artists involved, to show their own enthusiasm. That's the way to introduce music to children. ■  
*How would you spend £10m on classical music? Tell us, by emailing us at [music@classical-music.com](mailto:music@classical-music.com)*

## MUSICAL DESTINATIONS

## ITALY'S OPERATIC HEARTLAND

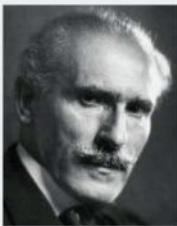
## Parma: Italy

**Elinor Cooper** travels to the musical heart of Italy for a festival celebrating little-known operatic gems by the region's most iconic composer, Giuseppe Verdi

The Italian province of Parma is world famous for its fine food – Parma ham and Parmesan cheese are the just two of its tasty products. But it also has an important role as a historical centre for art and music. Renaissance painter Correggio did some of his finest work in the ceilings of Parmese churches, the famous diva soprano Renata Tebaldi attended the local conservatory, and – nearly 500 years ago – Monteverdi wrote music for the Parmese ducal family.

But over all of these luminaries towers the figure of the great opera composer Giuseppe Verdi, who was born just a few miles north of the city in a village called Le Roncole.

## LOCAL HERO

**Arturo Toscanini**

Arturo Toscanini (1867-1957) is one of the most iconic conductors of the 20th century, thanks in part to his role as the first 'television' conductor in the 1920s. He began his career as a cellist

at Parma conservatory, and went on to become music director at La Scala, Milan, the Metropolitan Opera, New York, and the New York Philharmonic. The house in Parma where he was born is now a museum filled with artefacts from his life, including his piano. Upstairs, there's a collection of every recording Toscanini made, along with video footage of famous performances.

Today, the tavern in which he was born is a national monument to his memory, a museum, and point of pilgrimage for lovers of Verdi's music.

It's just one of many potential stops on a Verdi road-trip: in nearby Busseto you can visit Casa Baretti, the home of Verdi's patron Antonio Baretti, where Verdi gave his first ever public performance in 1830 on a piano which is still there today. The Baretti museum boasts a huge collection of portraits of Verdi and his family, and letters from the composer to his publishers, singers

## Verdi conducted his operas in front of the ferocious Parmese

and colleagues. You can also visit the two churches where Verdi worked as organist as a young man, and the Teatro Verdi, which was built 1868 and named after the composer. On opening night the operagoers all wore green as a sign of affection towards the maestro ('Verdi' means 'green' in Italian), but Verdi didn't show up.

Not long before the opening of the theatre, Verdi had returned to Busseto from Paris with the actress and soprano Giuseppina Strepponi. Scandalously for the time, they weren't married. The town shunned Strepponi, and so began a long-running feud. The Verdis soon moved away from Busseto to Sant'Agata, where Verdi had a new residence built especially for them: the Villa Verdi. They lived here until Strepponi's death

CROSSES AT THE READY:  
Don Carlo at the 2016 Verdi Festival; (below) The Villa Verdi in Sant'Agata, near Busseto



in 1897, after which the composer moved to Milan, unable to stay in Parma without his beloved second wife. The villa is now a museum, kept exactly as it was the day he left.

Today, this pilgrimage around the composer's life in Parma is topped off by the annual Verdi Festival – a celebration of his life and music. 'Even though his works are performed all over the world, there is a huge amount of hidden repertoire that could be better known,' says general manager of the festival Anna Maria Meo, 'and there's no better place to show this than in Parma, at the heart of the "Verdian lands".'

Busseto's Teatro Verdi is one of the main venues for the festival, alongside Parma's two main theatres – the Teatro Regio and Teatro Farnese. The Teatro Regio was a regular performance venue for Verdi, who often conducted his own operas here, in front of the famously ferocious Parmese audience.

## VERDI GREEN:

Verdi Square in Busseto outside the Teatro Verdi (below left)



The local opera crowd first earned a reputation as being hard to please in 1816, when the tenor Alberico Curioni was arrested after shouting obscenities back at the audience during opening night. At the end of the run Curioni got his revenge: halfway through the final performance he stopped singing and began whistling instead. He was again arrested and incarcerated for eight days, before being banned from ever visiting Parma again.

After you've jeered or cheered with the Parmese opera crowd, there's plenty more to see in this ancient city. 'Parma has such a monumental heritage,' says Meo. 'We have historic buildings, beautiful art galleries, and a fantastic gastronomic tradition!' This tradition is good an excuse as any to raise a glass of the local Lambrusco to the memory of the composer whose music lives on here, in the heart of Italy. ■

ROBERTO RICCI GETTY ISTOCK

## PARMA 3 MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS

### Jerusalem

Next year's Verdi Festival opens with the little-performed opera *Jerusalem*. Verdi wrote this reworking of his 1843 opera *I Lombardi* in 1847, adding a ballet and changing the setting to fit its new French audience.

### Stiffelio

Verdi angrily withdrew *Stiffelio* from circulation in 1856 after the censors asked him to write an alternative ending for the opera. The autograph disappeared until 1992, when the Carrara Verdi family allowed access to Verdi's score and accompanying sketches. *The complete Verdi Festival programme will be announced in January 2017*



### Bologna Jazz Festival

Nearby Bologna has a prestigious history when it comes to jazz. Legends Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie previously performed at the Bologna Jazz Festival – walk of fame-style paving slabs in their honour can be found near Bologna's market street. This year, highlights included performances by The Cookers and jazz collective Aziza, both of which feature musicians who worked with Davis: bassist Dave Holland (pictured left)

and drummer Billy Hart. While visiting, try Tortilloni – the real pasta Bolognese. *The Bologna Jazz Festival runs from late October–December every year.*

## COMPOSER OF THE MONTH

# HEINRICH SCHÜTZ

## Germany's colourful narrator

While Schütz is best known today for his choral masterpiece *The Christmas Story*, he also played a vital role in shaping German music with a little help from abroad, says **Paul Riley**

**E**xitable high recorders and dulcian speed the shepherds on their way to Bethlehem; the skies of 'Ehre sei Gott' pulsate with the whirring of angels' wings, while the brass accompanying the high priests add a touch of Rembrandt to an unfolding tableau that softens the precision and illustrative thrust of a Dürer woodcut with the festive sparkle of a beguiling instrumental palette. It's little wonder that of all Heinrich Schütz's works, *The Christmas Story*, first heard during Christmas Day Vespers 1660, is the best known. Some three quarters of a century later, JS Bach would marry theology, meditation and jubilation in his own six-cantata *Christmas Oratorio*; Schütz, however, is content to deliver season's greetings with a finely calibrated storytelling whose sheer freshness belies his 75 years.

The music is worlds away from the roughly contemporaneous portrait by Christoph Spetner in which a septuagenarian Schütz stares balefully ahead. Dignified, composed, he seems about to mutter 'bah, humbug...' if only he could summon the energy. The face is careworn – etched with the ravages of a life lived under the privations of the Thirty Years War – but Schütz's Christmas 'Historia' is no mere upbeat parting shot. In the dozen years left to him, he would maintain a creative vigour that resulted in three Passion settings and the posthumously published *Schwanengesang*, a legacy-crowning 'Swansong' bringing together imposing double choir elaborations of Psalms 119 and 100 and the German Magnificat.

It could all have turned out so differently. Like Handel after him, the young Heinrich had to face down parental opposition to any thoughts of a musical career. But he was doubly fortunate in coming under the patronage of Landgrave Moritz of Hessen-Kassel who admitted him to his court as a



### SCHÜTZ'S STYLE



#### Coro favorito/capella

Schütz's personal take on the Venetian multi-choir technique divides the forces into a 'coro favorito' of more skilled musicians whose function resembles the concertino in a Concerto Grosso, and the lesser skilled 'coro capella' that provides heft at climaxes.

#### Word painting

Schütz was solicitous in illustrating the words he was setting. Sometimes a melodic figure suffices, such as the encircling depiction of birds in *Psalmen Davids*' setting of Psalm 84, or more obvious is the matching of near approximations to the instruments mentioned in Psalm 150.

#### Venice

How would Schütz's music have turned out had he not headed towards Venice (above)? In the imperatives of the polychoral style and the sensuous freedom emanating from opera and the concertante intersection of voices and instruments, he found his distinctive voice.

#### Modes

Enthusiastic about the latest developments in Italian music, Schütz was reluctant to follow Italian composers in abandoning the modal system with its particular harmonic colouring. As late as the *Geistliche Chor-Music* of 1648 he still advocated its study.

choirboy, thus guaranteeing a fine education at the Collegium Mauritium. When Schütz dutifully signed up as a law student at the University of Marburg, it was Moritz who again intervened, recommending (so the composer later recalled) 'that a truly celebrated but quite old musician was still living in Italy and I should not miss the opportunity to hear him and learn from him'. As further inducement, the Landgrave offered generous financial assistance, and so it was that in 1609 Schütz arrived in Venice to seek out the 'quite old' (55!) organist of St Mark's: Giovanni Gabrieli.

Bowled over by the basilica's renowned predisposition towards polychoral music – setting choir against choir as well as combining them in ear-filling splendour – he felt something of a musical country bumpkin, but Gabrieli insisted on a firm grasp of Renaissance polyphony, so study of the likes of Palestrina, Lassus and Victoria was de rigueur alongside the opportunity to sample the newest Venice had to offer.

After two years with Gabrieli, Schütz felt able to unleash his Op. 1: *Il primo Libro de madrigali di Henrico Sagittario Allemano in Venetia MDCXI* – a collection 'warmly received by the most distinguished musicians in Venice,' he declared. What a pity that the 'primo' of the title never spawned a 'secondo', as it's a remarkable debut – certainly no graduation exercise – and the contents deserve to be as familiar as the madrigals of Monteverdi or Gesualdo. In keeping with Gabrieli's didactic purposes, there's no instrumental accompaniment and, dominated by settings of poets Giambattista Marino and Giovanni Guarini, the word-painting is subtly applied – 'O dolceze amarissimi', for instance, is a masterclass in the deployment of concord and dissonance to illustrate its plaintive surrender to sweetness most bitter. ▶



ILLUSTRATION: RISKO

Risko

# LIFE & TIMES

A quick guide to the main events in the life of Heinrich Schütz

## THE LIFE



**1585**

Heinrich Schütz is born on 8 October in **KÖSTRITZ**, Saxony. The second of eight children in an upper-class family, he is educated by the local Kantor and organist.

**1599**

At the age of 13, Schütz becomes a chorister after Moritz, composer and Landgrave of Hessen-Kassel, visits and hears him sing.



**1615**

After studying with **GIOVANNI GABRIELI** in Venice, he moves to Dresden to assist the Elector of Saxony and soon becomes the Kapellmeister. This move cements his career as a composer.

**1627**

He composes *Dafne* which, although largely spoken, is generally regarded as the first German opera.

**1642**

Having been first invited to Denmark back in 1633, he moves to Copenhagen from Dresden to act as Kapellmeister. He remains there for two years.

**1656**

The Elector of Saxony dies and Schütz finally retires from his position in Dresden after years of asking. He still continues to compose for events at the court.

GETTY



**1672**

Schütz dies at the age of 88 in Dresden. His final work, known as his *Schwanengesang* or 'SWANSONG', is performed at his funeral.

**1585**

**THE TIMES**

**1585**

Chocolate is introduced to Europe when the Spanish bring from South America **CACAO SEEDS** that they intend to sell to the rest of the continent.

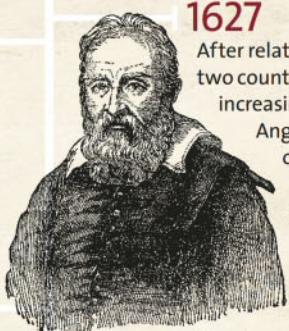


**1599**

The ancient city of Pompeii, buried since the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD, is discovered by workers digging a canal to divert the River Sarno.

**1615**

With their ships destroyed by a storm on an expedition to Iceland, Basque whalers are killed by the local people, later known as the 'Spánverjavígin' (or 'Slaying of the Spaniards').



**1627**

After relations between the two countries have become increasingly hostile, the Anglo-French War breaks out, with the English supporting Huguenot rebels against the French crown.

**1642**

Considered to be a heretic and held under house arrest by papal forces, the astronomer, physicist and philosopher **GALILEO GALILEI** dies in Arcetri, Florence.

**1656**

The **PENDULUM CLOCK** is invented by Dutch scientist Christiaan Huygens. As it enormously improves the accuracy of time-keeping, it soon enjoys widespread use.



**1672**

The Rampjaar occurs in the Dutch Republic. In this 'disaster year', the Dutch are invaded by the French, the English, and several German states.

**1672**

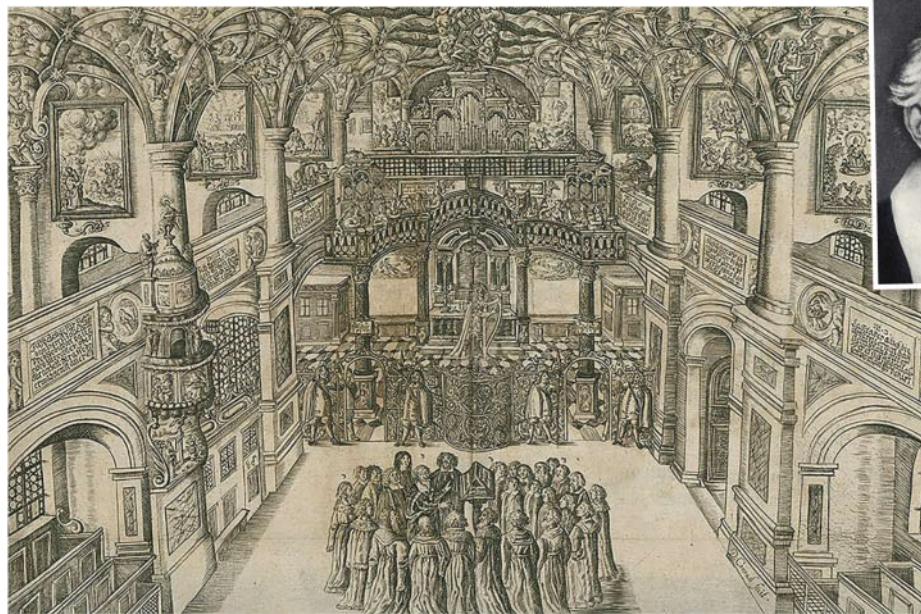
What Schütz learnt in Venice never left him, and importantly he was drawn back in 1628 (this time under his own initiative) to find out what had been 'trending' in the intervening years. His genius would reside in finding ways of adapting Italian tailoring to the homespun cloth of his native German tradition, and in doing so he set both the tone and the impetus of German music for a generation and beyond.

Returning to Kassel in 1613, the city must have seemed humdrum after Venice and, to make matters worse, Schütz subsequently bowed to parental pressure and resumed his law studies. But there intervened another stroke of luck – though Landgrave Moritz might not have seen it that way – as Schütz was headhunted by the tenacious Elector Johann Georg I of Saxony. After protracted to-ing and fro-ing, he was eventually assigned permanently to the Dresden Court, officially assuming the role of Kapellmeister in 1619.

Anyone perusing the 13 opus-numbered collections Schütz published over his lifetime might be forgiven for thinking of him as a composer of purely sacred music (Op. 1 aside). This seriously skews the truth. One of his early Dresden tasks was to provide a lavish ballet in honour of a Hapsburg visit, and creating suitably opulent theatrical and ceremonial occasional music went with the territory of Kapellmeister even if, by and large, it hasn't survived. Most intriguing of all is the case of *Dafne*, a pastoral tragicomedy, performed in 1627 and credited with being the first opera to be presented in Germany. Just how 'operatic' it was by current Italian standards is open to question, since it wasn't until the following year that Schütz's encounter with Monteverdi opened up new and highly relevant vistas. Venice, he confided to a colleague, taught him how to master 'a range of diverse voices so that they can be translated into declamatory style and brought to the stage'.

In the meantime, however, Schütz had finally succumbed to publishing an Op. 2, and in the *Psalmen Davids* shared his initial Venetian impressions in an anthology of 'German Psalms in the Italian Style'. The preface gives useful tips on the layout of musical forces to achieve the desired spatial effects, and there is discernable Italian fall-out to be found in some of the ornamentation deployed by the Resurrection 'Historia' of 1623. More intimate are the *Cantiones sacrae* of 1625, a volume of four-part Latin motets artfully varied in the 'orchestration' of the voices – private devotional music ideally suited to a Princely chapel.

The next collection has Venice stamped all over it, and not just because the first volume



**HOLDING COURT:**  
Schütz (left), as depicted in  
Spetner's famous portrait; (far left)  
with his musicians in the chapel of  
the royal palace in Dresden

Forging his own synthesis of musics, ancient and modern, northern and southern, opulent and austere, Schütz was the pre-eminent German composer of his age with an influence that long outlived him. A plaque attached to his tomb in Dresden's Frauenkirche proclaimed 'a joy for foreigners, a light for Germans'. A light down the centuries, in fact – for as a 'collected works' began to roll off the presses at the end of the 19th century, no one approached each new instalment with more excitement than a certain Johannes Brahms. ■

of *Symphoniae sacrae* was published there in 1629. 'Motetti con sinfonie', as championed by composers Donati and Grandi, were all the rage and Schütz studied what he called the 'fresh devices' that forward-looking composers were deploying 'to tickle the ears of today'. Here was a music that moved fluidly between duple and triple metres, encouraged seductive embellishment and revelled in instrumental give and take. But Schütz was no slavish copycat. While his mentors were drawn to the accompaniment of two obbligato violins and continuo, he, mindful of German partiality for wind instruments, rang the changes. While six of the *Symphoniae sacrae* settings follow the example of his hosts, the remainder (nearly three quarters of the collection) are open to all sorts of possibilities. Particularly striking is David's lament for his son Absalom, where four sonorous trombones support the solo bass. Two further volumes would follow in 1647 and '50 with German texts replacing Latin, and in *Es steh Gott auf* Schütz paid overt and handsome homage to Monteverdi.

Emphasising his readiness to embrace the new requires a little qualification, however. Just as Schütz's teacher Gabrieli had insisted on a solid grounding in the architectural discipline of Palestrinian polyphony, so the erstwhile pupil increasingly counselled aspiring composers to build on solid foundations. And he led by example. In some respects the preface to the *Geistliche Chor-Music* published a year after the forward-looking *Symphoniae sacrae II* is almost a manifesto. In it, Schütz argues for the mastery of 'an orderly management of the modes, the mechanics of fugue and double counterpoint, and (especially) mastery of polyphonic writing

for voices', before going on to demonstrate in 29 exquisitely crafted motets, the 'stile antico' in all its statuesque glory. Tellingly, when in 1670 he asked a favourite ex-student Christoph Bernard to compose a funeral motet in readiness for his obsequies when the time should come, he asked that it be 'in the style of Palestrina'.

That time came in 1672, when Schütz had been in the service of the Dresden Court for 57 years – years long overshadowed by the privations of the Thirty Years War. In the foreword to *Kleine geistliche Konzerte* of

## The quality of Schütz's output borders on the miraculous

1636, he bemoaned the fact that 'the laudable art of music has not only greatly declined but at some places has even been completely abandoned'. The latter fate never befell Dresden, of course, but at times only by a hair's breadth. Schütz's available musicians numbered fewer than ten at one point, wages went unpaid for long periods, and even as late as 1651 (three years after the Peace of Westphalia was signed) he was petitioning on behalf of a singer who 'lives like a sow in a pigsty, has no bedding, lies on straw, and has pawned his coat and jacket'.

Schütz must have been grateful for two lengthy sojourns in Denmark. Indeed, against such a backdrop, compounded – ironically – in later years by ill-feeling arising from the dominance of Italian musicians in the household, the quantity and sovereign quality of his output borders on the miraculous.

**BBC RADIO**  *Composer of the Week is broadcast on Radio 3 at 12pm, Mon to Fri, repeated at 6.30pm.*  
*Upcoming programmes are:*  
**28 Nov – Dec** *Jacob and Horovitz*  
**5–9 December** *Handel*  
**12–16 December** *Francesca Caccini*  
**19–23 December** *Prokofiev*  
**26–30 December** *Ivor Novello*

## HEINRICH SCHÜTZ

### RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

#### **Christmas Vespers**

Gabrieli Consort and Players/Paul McCreesh  
DG E463 0462 (download)  
*The Christmas Story* is wrapped here in the context of a Christmas Vespers service.



#### **Musikalische Exequien**

Vox Luminis/Lionel Meunier  
Ricercar RIC311  
Schütz's haunting music for the funeral of a prince is delivered with a dignified immediacy.



#### **First Book of Madrigals**

Cantus Cölln/Junghänel  
Harmonia Mundi HMG501686  
Schütz's countrymen do him proud in the first fruits of his studies in Venice.



#### **The Complete Narrative Works**

Ars Nova Copenhagen/  
Paul Hillier  
Dacapo 8204035  
Schütz's six 'Historiae' in performances that are as stylish and as they are thoughtfully considered.



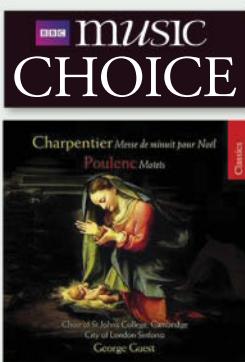
BUILDING A LIBRARY

# FOUR CHRISTMAS MOTETS

## Francis Poulenc

As Poulenc invites us to share in the magic of the nativity scene in four exquisitely crafted works for unaccompanied choir, *Terry Blain* selects the finest recordings available

Poulenc as a religious composer? To those who know the colourful orchestral works, the worldly songs and the ebullient chamber pieces, it can be a difficult idea to get used to. Speaking of his sacred music, though, Poulenc said 'I think I've put the best and most genuine part of myself into it', and the Catholic ethos of the composer's childhood became increasingly important as he got older and suffered life's buffettings – his 'peasant devotion', he called it, 'distinctive and hereditary in me'. Into this context fit the *Quatre Motets pour le Temps de Noël* (Four Christmas Motets), a setting of Latin texts completed in 1952, when Poulenc was 53. The nativity scene, the shepherds, and the Wise Men's arrival are depicted in three meditative movements. The fourth explodes with joy – 'Christ is born today!' – recalling Poulenc's early years as Parisian boulevardier and party animal.



George Guest  
(conductor)  
Choir of St John's  
College, Cambridge  
(1988)  
Chandos CHAN 10448 X

ILLUSTRATION: STEVE RAWLINGS/DEBUT ART

### THE BEST RECORDING GEORGE GUEST

IN HIS 40 YEARS as director of music at St John's College, Cambridge, George Guest built a formidable choir of boy choristers and male undergraduates. He had a particular affinity for French repertoire, and it's no surprise his recording of Poulenc's Christmas Motets is so vividly successful.

Even in the hushed opening of 'O magnum mysterium', which can seem flat and sleepy, Guest is already conjuring atmosphere, the subtle dynamic inflections of the lower voices sharpening expectations. The treble entry, when it comes, is pure and silvery, and the tenors match it at 'Beata virgo', which rises up gleaming and supple from the choral textures.



Guest's expert balancing of the four voice-parts reveals more of the detail in Poulenc's often tart, surprising harmonisations than in any competing version. The awkward side-steps on 'aurum, thus et myrrham' ('gold, frankincense and myrrh') in 'Videntes stellam', and again at the conclusion, are

pitch-perfectly tuned, and heighten the sense of strangeness Poulenc finds in the story of the Magi's visit.

The nuanced account of 'Hodie Christus natus est' – often an aggressive shout-fest – underlines the infectious alacrity Guest brings to the music-making, and his ability to give the Latin words meaning. It caps a wonderfully warm, involving performance, ideally captured by the Chandos team.



*Building a Library* is broadcast on BBC Radio 3 at 9.30am each Saturday as part of *Record Review*. A highlights podcast is available at [www.bbc.co.uk/radio3](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3)

keeps the individual parts clearly focused. But the technical excellence of The Sixteen is the really telling factor. Their detailed responsiveness to conductor Harry Christophers's sensitive presentation of the music is never self-advertising, or bought at the expense of obvious strain or effort. The pointillistic precision at the opening of 'Videntes stellam' and the combination of nimbleness and dynamism in 'Hodie' are just two highlights in a performance of outstanding all-round accomplishment.

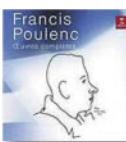


**John Rutter (conductor)**  
The Cambridge Singers (2002)  
*Collegium CSDC506*

Pitched somewhere between the fresh, youthful Oxbridge college sound and a fully adult choir like The Sixteen are John Rutter's mixed-voice Cambridge Singers. In Rutter's hands, 'O magnum mysterium' has a lissome, sensual quality, the sopranos achieving a pure, crystalline tonal quality which is particularly alluring. Vibrato is kept to an absolute minimum, which means that this is one of the best-tuned versions available, and one of the few where the hummed sections in 'Quem vidistis pastores' are more than a bleary buzz in the background. Rutter's 'Hodie Christus natus est' is also one of the best there is – rhythmically precise, yet bursting with exuberance. A sparkling performance of the Gloria adds further enticement to this excellent Poulenc anthology.

*Hear three of Poulenc's Four Christmas Motets sung by The King's Singers on your cover CD*

## THREE MORE GREAT RECORDINGS



### Martin Neary (conductor)

Winchester

Cathedral Choir (1987)

Warner Classics 972 1652

It says something for the technical control and concentration the Winchester singers bring to bear that conductor Martin Neary can add a full minute to the standard three-minute timing for the opening 'O magnum mysterium', and not reap negative consequences. On the contrary, this is a raptly sustained piece of singing, more meditatively inclined and inward-looking than most rival versions. And while Neary's vocal blending is silkier and more homogenised than Guest's, the

Winchester choir is still capable of cutting attacks when necessary – at 'Dicte quidnam vidistis' in 'Quem vidistis pastores', for instance, and in an ebullient 'Hodie'.



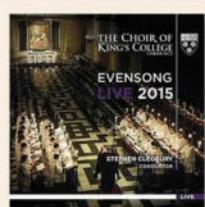
### Harry Christophers (conductor)

The Sixteen (1990)

Erato 562 4312 (download)

Of all the versions sung by adult voices, this is the one which gets closest to achieving the clarity of texture and harmonic movement which distinguishes the St John's College interpretation. This is partly to do with the excellently engineered recording, which, while allowing resonance,

## AND ONE TO AVOID...



As a record of the special experience that is evensong at King's College, Cambridge, this CD undoubtedly has value. But these are live recordings,

and the sound of page turns, rustlings and congregational coughing is an irritation in the Poulenc, working against the sense of intimacy needed for much of the music. The singing is impressive, but has a practised suavity that militates against a deeper imaginative engagement with these settings.

If you enjoy Poulenc's *Four Christmas Motets* and would like to try out similar works, see overleaf...

## SO, WHERE NEXT...?

We suggest works to explore after Poulenc's *Four Christmas Motets*



### Poulenc *Litanies à la Vierge Noire*

In 1936, Poulenc's close friend Pierre-Octave Ferroud was killed in a car accident. Anguished, Poulenc turned to the Catholic church for comfort and embarked upon a pilgrimage to Notre Dame de Rocamadour, a church in mountainous south-west France. *Litanies à la Vierge Noire* was written just a week after the pilgrimage, and was the first of a stream of sacred works that defined the next period of Poulenc's musical career. *Litanies* is a series of prayers to the Virgin Mary which beg for mercy and understanding, set here for upper voices. Poulenc's chant-like modal writing lends a ghostly serenity to the text, though this is interrupted abruptly at points by a brash organ part.

**Recommended recording:** Tenebrae/Nigel Short *Signum SIGCD187*

### Milhaud *Les deux cités*

Just two years after he'd written *Litanies à la Vierge Noire*, Poulenc penned his first group of *Quatre motets*, for 'un temps de pénitence' (Lent). He'd been inspired to write them by the 1938 premiere of Milhaud's *Les deux cités*, a three-movement *a cappella* choral work setting words by Paul Claudel. Both Milhaud and Poulenc were members of Les Six, so it's perhaps no surprise to find a shared spirit and style in their vocal music. *Les deux cités* is intense and austere yet expressive, its texts based on Saint Augustine. 'Babylone' has an archaic quality, while the mesmerising 'Elégie' features a solo mezzo and humming

choir backdrop. The agile 'Jerusalem', with its peals of scales, rounds off the piece.

**Recommended recording:** Netherlands Chamber Choir/Stephen Layton *Globe GLO5206*

### Messiaen *O sacrum convivium*

If religion played something of a bit part in Poulenc's life, his near-contemporary Olivier Messiaen was a man of deep Christian faith. All the more remarkable, then, that his *O sacrum convivium* of 1937 was the only liturgical choral work he ever wrote. Just like Poulenc's 'O magnum mysterium', a work it preceded by 14 years, Messiaen's motet, whose text expresses a sense of wonder at the sacred feast, begins in dark, sombre style, weaving slowly and chromatically around the stave. And while a climax of sorts is reached at the words 'futurae gloriae', the overall tone is one of hushed reverence.

**Recommended recording:** Choir of St John's College, Cambridge/Andrew Nethsingha *Chandos CHAN10842*

### Naji Hakim *Trois Noëls*

The Lebanese-French Naji Hakim took over from Messiaen at Paris's La Trinité a year after the latter's death in 1992, staying for 15 years. Blessed with an astonishing talent for improvisation, Hakim is also a prolific composer of organ music as well as several striking choral works. The *Trois Noëls*, written in 2001, all have a 20th-century French feel, with Poulenc an



obvious influence, Hakim's rich harmonies warmly spicing up traditional folk tunes. Poulenc's spirit, however, is most present in the final of the three carols, 'Noël'. Its beautifully suave opening, reminiscent of parts of Poulenc's 'O Magnum Mysterium', gives way to a contrasting section where Hakim gives full rein to his love of Langlais, Duruflé and jazz.

**Recommended recording:**  
Ex Cathedra/Jeffrey Skidmore  
*Orchid Classics ORC100008*

### Villette *Hymne à la Vierge*

A chorister at Rouen Cathedral and later a student of composer Maurice Duruflé, Pierre Villette (1926–98) was immersed in the world of liturgical choral music from the outset. Of the many motets he composed, the most famous is undoubtedly the *Hymne à la Vierge*, a work for unaccompanied choir that, intriguingly, was premiered not in France but at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester in 1981 – Worcester Cathedral choirmaster Donald Hunt was a long-term champion of Villette. Setting words by author Roland Bouhéret, *Hymne à la Vierge* is characterised by gorgeous harmonies, little chromatic twists and a general sense of serenity, and has become a regular at cathedral and church carol services.

**Recommended recording:** Holst Singers/Stephen Layton *Hyperion CDA67539*

### Langlais *Venite et audite*

Like Messiaen, Jean Langlais studied the organ under Dukas in Paris. Going on to become organist at the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde for over 40 years, his own music reflected his strong Catholic beliefs. Written in 1958, *Venite et audite* is a work for unaccompanied choir whose Latin words enthusiastically invite the listener to 'come and listen... and I will tell you what [God] hath done for my soul.' Less than two minutes long, it's delightfully ebullient, with a melody that brims with energy – the effervescence of 'Hodie Christus Natus est' from Poulenc's *Four Motets* can be heard here too, and how.

**Recommended recording:** Ensemble Vocal Jean Sourisse/Jean Sourisse *Syrius SYR 141327*

#### Next month:

Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*

# A Guide to Perfect Listening

Six pages of the ultimate hi-fi equipment, from groundbreaking speakers and stylish headphones, to music streaming systems and portable DACs (digital to analogue converters)





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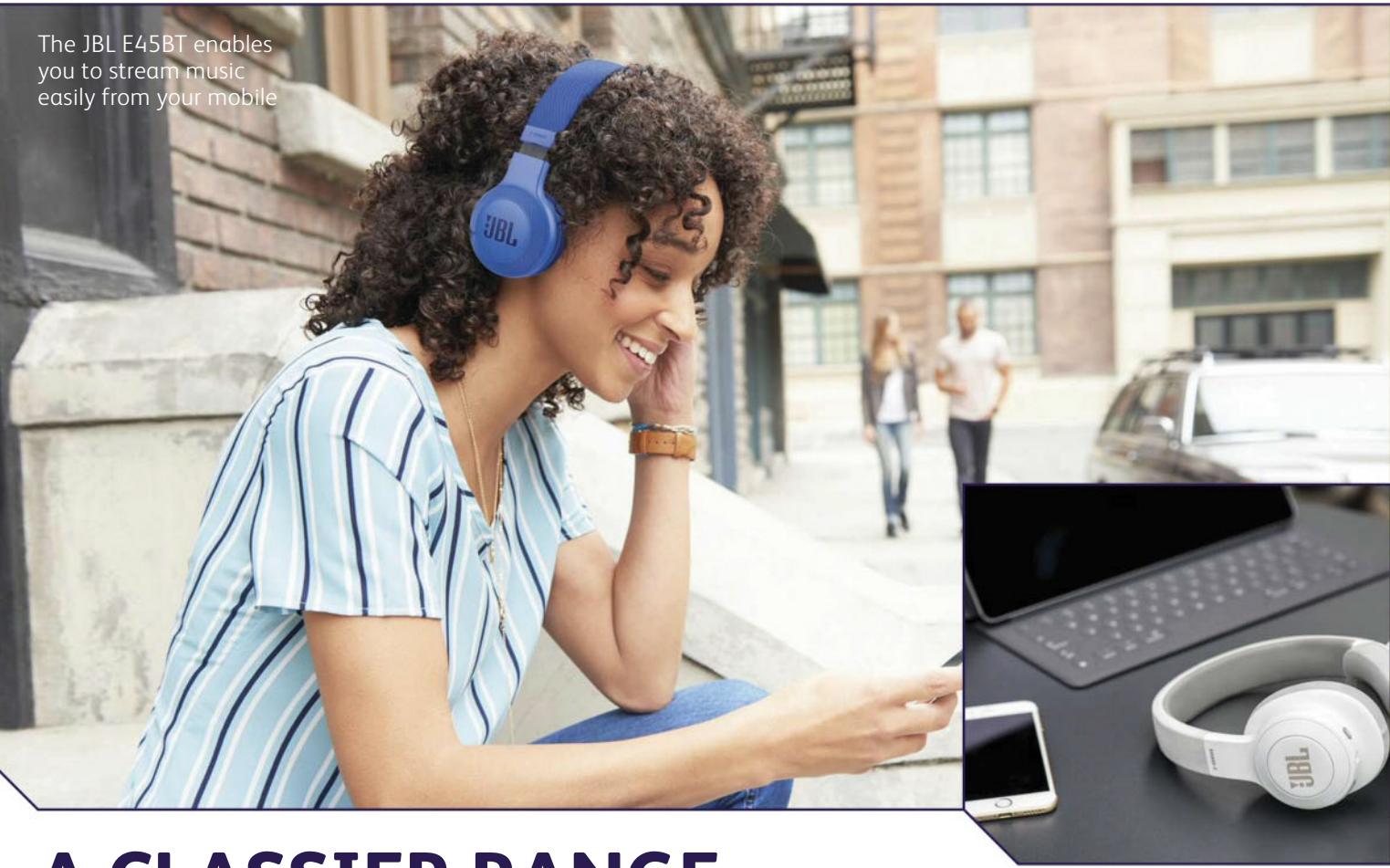
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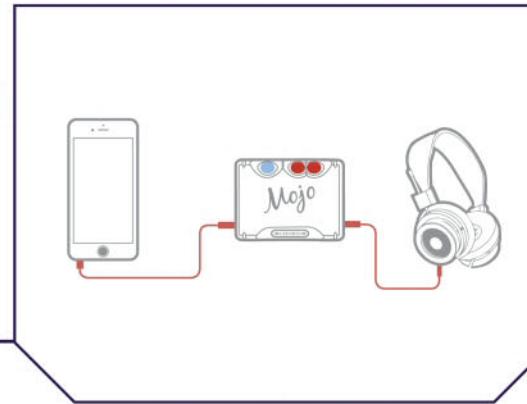


## KEY FEATURES

- **Attention to detail** Chartwell LS3/5s are handbuilt in Devon, UK, by Graham Audio, an award-winning loudspeaker manufacturer
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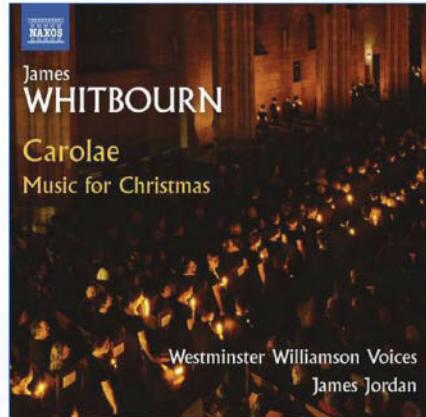
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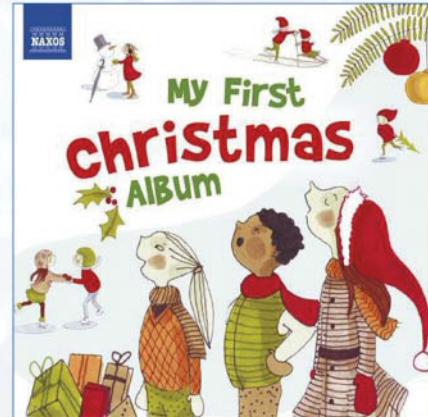
# Christmas 2016



CAROLAE: MUSIC FOR  
CHRISTMAS



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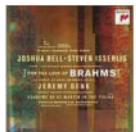
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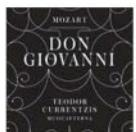
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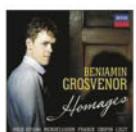
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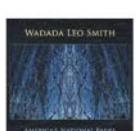


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BBC music

# REVIEWS

110 CDs, Books & DVDs rated by expert critics



### Recording of the Month

Pianist Murray Perahia turns to the tender and refined French Suites as he continues his journey through JS Bach's keyboard works with his first disc on Deutsche Grammophon, p64



ELOQUENT BACH:  
Perahia's playing  
speaks volumes

## The sounds of Christmas



Our postbag has been packed with Christmas CDs, and we've rounded up the highlights on p66. And there were a few last-minute arrivals that you might want to add your festive wish list. Voces8 sets the scene with its *Winteralbum* (Decca), while the Royal Hospital Chelsea Chapel Choir has put together a more traditional carol disc (Somm). Les Musiciens de Saint-Julien offers a 'Noël Baroque', with a programme featuring, among others, Corrette, Daquin and Marc-Antoine Charpentier (Alpha). And you can hear all Charpentier's Christmas pastorals and Advent antiphons on the Ensemble Correspondances's new disc (Harmonia Mundi). Merry Christmas! **Rebecca Franks** *Reviews Editor*

Our Recording of the Month features in one of the **BBC Music Magazine** podcasts  
free from iTunes or [www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)

# RECORDING OF THE MONTH



**POET AT THE PIANO:**  
Murray Perahia is  
inimitable in Bach

## Brilliant Bach

*Paul Riley applauds Murray Perahia's dapper French Suites*



### JS BACH

#### French Suites

Murray Perahia (piano)  
Deutsche Grammophon 479 6565  
91:39 mins (2 discs)

Bach's French Suites might seem an unusual choice to mark Murray Perahia's signing to the Yellow Label. Outwardly unprepossessing, for many they are overshadowed by their feistier English Suite cousins. But how could it be otherwise?

Perahia has already recorded so many Bachian big-hitters – the *Goldberg Variations* and Partitas among them – during his time with Sony Classical that there are few Everests left to climb. There is, though, one glaring not to say intriguing lacuna: *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Yet so joyously conceived, so full of insights is this Deutsche Grammophon French Suites debut, it proves to be a decidedly auspicious one after all.

The English Suites and keyboard Partitas can't help but engender a certain heft: it's hardwired into

music that experiments with concerto-style brio and indulges in lavishly embellished elaborations almost at the drop of a hat. Half of the Sarabandes gracing the English Suites are paired with opulent

'Doubles', and the A major's second Courante boasts two, no less.

The challenge with the French Suites (1722–25), at any rate when they're played on the piano, is to avoid making them sound too effete. That's especially true for a pianist of Perahia's instantly recognisable translucency and dapper disposition.

### Murray Perahia is unrivalled in coaxing a subtle dialogue

## FURTHER LISTENING

### Murray Perahia

#### BRAHMS

*Handel Variations; Two Rhapsodies, Op. 79; Piano Pieces, Opp. 118 & 119*  
Murray Perahia (piano)  
Sony 88697727252 78:37 mins



'Perahia's long experience with Bach's keyboard works gives him a natural point of entry to the *Handel Variations*. He takes quite fast tempos that nevertheless sound so inevitable that the work seems to unfold in one majestic breath.'

February 2011

#### BEETHOVEN

*Piano Sonatas, Op. 14 Nos 1 & 2; Op. 26; Op. 28*  
Murray Perahia (piano)  
Sony 88697326462 70:58 mins



'It's been a while since Murray Perahia recorded Beethoven. The wait has been well worthwhile. A masterly recital, and one whose undemonstrative performances enable the music to speak for itself most eloquently.'

January 2009

#### JS BACH

*Goldberg Variations*  
Murray Perahia (piano)  
Sony SK 89243 73:28 mins



'Murray Perahia is one of our finest Bach pianists, as his recent recordings of the English Suites confirm. His *Goldbergs* flow mellifluously with fine linear clarity. This is warm-hearted and spirited playing.'

July 2007

He sidesteps the risk with aplomb. The Gigue of the C minor Suite No. 2 buzzes like a wasp trapped in a jam jar, and there's no lack of muscular resolution in the Suite No. 4 in E flat major's Gigue, or its French-style D minor counterpart (Suite No. 1) – played with crisp, spiky, incisively-etched hauteur to the manner born.

Perahia is unrivalled in coaxing a subtle dialogue in the dances that resort to the artful pared-back minimalism of the two-part

invention. There's nowhere to hide, and Perahia's effortless variety of touch, love of teasing voice-leading, and conversational affability would have it no other way.

His tempos feel exactly right; he never overloads the Sarabandes with an import inappropriate to their setting, and the saucy twinkle of the G major Gavotte (No. 5) is emblematic of a set whose *galanterien* unfailingly scintillate.

All three major key French Suites harbour a Gavotte; the E flat sports two. Perahia ensures that somehow each aspires to more than the sum of its aristocratic parts. Even the rhythmically idiosyncratic Loure from the G major Suite dodges the

potential bullet of sounding gauche and emerges here uncommonly natural and unaffected.

The recorded sound will be a touch over-resonant for some tastes, but this is a set that gets ever more persuasive on repeated listening.

Let's hope Deutsche Grammophon can persuade Perahia to break his silence on *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. And soon.

RECORDING  
PERFORMANCE

★★★★★  
★★★★



#### ON THE PODCAST

Hear excerpts and a discussion of this recording on the **BBC Music Magazine podcast**, available free on iTunes or at [www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)

## Q&A

### MURRAY PERAHIA

*The legendary pianist tells REBECCA FRANKS why the music of JS Bach remains his daily bread*



In your Bach journey on disc, you've now reached the French Suites. How do they compare to his other keyboard works?

They are in a different style to the English Suites and the keyboard Partitas. They are less virtuosic, very tender and rather delicate. A lot of the voice-leading is in two or three parts, like the inventions or sinfonias, so they are not as brilliant in the obvious sense as the other pieces I have recorded. But I find them full of love and sensitivity. Bach gave them as a present to his wife at some point, I think – they are, bar the Sixth Suite, in the Anna Magdalena Notebook. There's that tenderness to them.

#### What does playing Bach on the piano bring to the music?

For two years solidly I worked on the harpsichord, which was a great experience. But I sort of wanted them to sound contemporary, in a strange way. I wanted the idiom not to overpower the message. The message for me is very important. And the message is through the counterpoint, the harmony, understanding how direction is achieved in the music, and subtle interplays of rhythm. Of course that's possible on a harpsichord, but because of the dynamic contrasts you can get on the piano you can make some of the structural points clearer. I did use the sustaining pedal a bit as I think the piano sounds better with it.

#### What place does Bach occupy in your life?

Central. There's hardly a day goes by that I'm not listening to it. I always find it so beautiful. Just the other day I had concerts where I wasn't playing Bach, but just before I immersed myself in some Bach cantatas. I find it so inexplicably beautiful.

#### Do you have any plans to record *The Well-Tempered Clavier*?

That's always a dream! But I don't know. I hope so.

## THIS MONTH'S CRITICS

*Our critics number many of the top music specialists whose knowledge and enthusiasm are second to none*



**Helen Wallace** writer, critic

Helen joined *BBC Music Magazine* in 1993 and was editor from 1998–2004, and consultant editor and chair of the Awards jury until 2016. She's author of *Boosey & Hawkes: The Publishing Story* and *Spirit of the Orchestra*, and currently programming consultant and editor-in-chief at London's Kings Place.

**John Allison**

editor, *Opera*; critic,  
*Sunday Telegraph*

**Nicholas Anderson**

Baroque specialist

**Terry Blain**

writer, critic

**Kate Bolton-Porciatti**

lecturer, New York University, Florence

**Garry Booth**

jazz writer & critic

**Geoff Brown**

critic, *The Times*  
writer, editor

**Michael Church**

writer, critic, *The Independent*

**Stephen Johnson**

writer, broadcaster

**Berta Joncus** senior lecturer, Goldsmiths, Belfast

**Christopher Cook** broadcaster, critic

**Elinor Cooper**

journalist

**Martin Cotton**

radio & recording producer

**Christopher Dingle**

professor of music, Birmingham Conservatoire

**David Nice**

writer, biographer

**Misha Donat**

producer, writer

French music specialist

**Bayan Northcott**

writer, composer

**Anna Picard**

writer, critic

**Jeremy Pound**

journalist

**George Pratt**

emeritus professor of music, University of Huddersfield

**Anthony Prys**

lecturer, Goldsmiths, University of London

**Paul Riley**

journalist, critic

**Jan Smaczny**

professor of music, Queen's University, Belfast

**Geoffrey Smith**

presenter, BBC Radio 3's Geoffrey Smith's Jazz

**Michael Tanner**

critic, *The Spectator*

**Roger Thomas**

jazz critic

**Kate Wakeling**

writer, researcher

**Barry Witherden**

writer, critic

**Key to symbols** Star ratings are provided for both the performance itself and either the recording's sound quality or a DVD's presentation

Outstanding	★★★★★
Excellent	★★★★
Good	★★★
Disappointing	★★
Poor	★

## VISIT THE REVIEWS ARCHIVE

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[www.classical-music/album-reviews](http://www.classical-music/album-reviews)

# CHRISTMAS CHOICE

Terry Blain picks the best of this year's crop, including John Butt's spruced up *Christmas Oratorio*, and a DVD documentary on the origin of England's beloved Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols

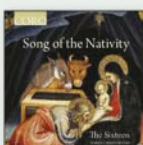
## BBC MUSIC CHRISTMAS CHOICE

### Notes for the Nativity

Terry Blain admires the unshowy mastery of The Sixteen



ART CONCEALING ART:  
the choir places the  
focus on the music itself



#### SONG OF THE NATIVITY

The Sixteen/Harry Christophers  
*Coro COR16146 73:58 mins*

Christmas CDs by famous choirs can have an element of routine or cashing in to them, but not this one. From the gorgeously shaped performance of Morten Lauridsen's modern classic *O magnum mysterium* which opens the programme, to the urgent, ardent account of James MacMillan's *O radiant dawn* which closes it,

The Sixteen give a masterclass in the art of unaccompanied singing, and in close emotional engagement with the pieces chosen. These are a canny combination of old and new. Boris Ord's classic setting of *Adam lay ybounden* rubs shoulders

#### The Sixteen's consummate technical ability is legendary

with Howard Skempton's anxiously pulsing version, while the traditional *How far is it to Bethlehem?* is counterpointed by Peter Warlock's *Bethlehem Down*. Throughout there is an emphasis on the less familiar corners of the repertoire. Among these Will Todd's tenderly

ecstatic *My Lord has come*, Cecilia McDowall's vibrant, chant-inspired *Now may we singen*, Alec Roth's thrumming *Song of the Shepherds*, and Alan Bullard's awestruck *And all the stars looked down* are particularly welcome inclusions. The Sixteen's consummate technical ability has long been legendary, but it's their ability to conceal it which is truly special. It puts the music front and centre, in this beautifully realised Christmas sequence.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

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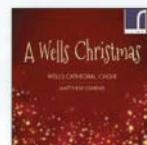
#### JS BACH

##### *Christmas Oratorio*

Dunedin Consort/John Butt  
*Linn CKD499 141:19 mins (2 discs)*

This is the latest in an acclaimed series of Bach recordings by the Edinburgh-based Dunedin Consort. It has the same sense of freshness as previous releases, with one singer to a part except in the three cantatas which use trumpets, where there are two. This leads to a pleasing transparency of texture, and nimbly sprung rhythms under John Butt's scholarly direction. Arias and recitatives generally emerge more convincingly than choruses, where the recording struggles to integrate singers and players in a single acoustic, and the instrumental playing can be scraggy.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



#### A WELLS CHRISTMAS

Carols by Chilcott, Carter,  
McConaughey, Sargent,  
Willcocks, Rutter, Vaughan  
Williams, Owens et al

Wells Cathedral Choir/Matthew Owens  
*Reson RES10176 61:54 mins*

The boys and girls – 29 in total – who sing the soprano line in the Wells Cathedral Choir stand out for their contribution to this recording. They are seamlessly blended by choirmaster Matthew Owens, who has cultivated a bright, gleaming sonority, and the type of crisp attack heard to good effect in the *Zither Carol*. The lower voices are less well integrated, and the stylistic interface with the sopranos can be lumpy. But with zesty, fresh-minted performances of favourites

by Vaughan Williams, Rutter, Willcocks and others, this is a desirable collection.

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★★★



## CHRISTMAS SONGBOOK

Trad. arr. Rice, Roberts and L'Estrange

The King's Singers  
Signum Classics SIGCD459 56:24 mins

Ten years after the last King's Singers Christmas CD, here's another. It mixes snappy arrangements of American secular favourites like *Santa Claus is coming to town* and *It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas*, with more traditional selections such as *In the Bleak Midwinter* and *The First Nowell*. The six-part harmonies are typically immaculate, although you have some very close microphone placements to contend with, making the sound at times claustrophobic. The studio multi-tracking in *Carol of the Bells* is fun, though, and King's Singers diehards won't hesitate.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★

*The King's Singers also feature on this month's magazine cover CD: 'A King's Singers Christmas'*



## CHRISTMAS WITH ST JOHN'S

Christmas choral works by Gardner, Gruber, McDowell, Poston, Rutter, Rütti, Warlock, Willcocks, Wood, Finnissy, Bingham et al

The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge/Andrew Nethsingha  
Signum SIGCD458 66:45 mins

There's some slightly fussy interpretation here – *The Holly and the Ivy* nit-picks at details of articulation – and occasionally the singing has a becalmed quality, as in a droopy *Adam lay ybounden* and Rutter's *Dormi, Jesu*, where the lower voices needed firmer sculpting. But there are treasures too, not least the rapt performance of Cornelius's *The Three Kings*, where Peter Lidbetter is an eloquent soloist, and a delicately inflected, touching account of Elizabeth Poston's *Jesus Christ, the*

*Apple Tree*. Excellent engineering captures evocatively the atmosphere of St John's College chapel.

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★★★



## CHRISTMAS WITH SEPTURA

JS Bach, Brahms, Darke, Handel, Praetorius, Rachmaninov, Schütz, Warlock etc – arr. for brass septet

Septura  
Naxos 8.573719 64:15 mins

Is it the warm glow of harmoniously blended brass instruments which link them particularly with the Christmas season? Probably, and if you like a shot of brass to set the festive ambiance, this new anthology by Septura, an elite group drawing on the finest players in London, is just the ticket. The selections range widely, from the golden sonorities of Schütz's *Geistliche Chormusik* to a clever antiphonal arrangement of Leontovich's *Carol of the Bells*. Three rousing numbers from Handel's *Messiah* cap a recital so entertaining that the missing words don't matter.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



## THERE IS NO ROSE

Carols by Borch, Bullard, Causton, Chilcott, Holst, MacMillan and Nielsen

Vocal Group Concert Clemens  
Orchid Classics ORC100062 56:14 mins

Vocal Group Concert Clemens is a chamber choir of 16 singers based in Aarhus, Denmark, which to date has made a limited number of recordings. This one is outstanding: the group produces exceptionally pure-toned singing, and the engineering is alluringly atmospheric. The singers avoid vibrato, and this produces performances of unusual textural clarity, freshening even favourite carols like *The Holly and the Ivy*. The programming is fresh too, with plenty of less familiar items, and Nielsen's *Mit hjerte altid vanker* ('My heart always wanders') given a mesmerisingly pellucid performance.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



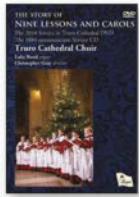
## DROP DOWN, YE HEAVENS

Advent antiphons for choir and saxophone

Siglo de Oro/Patrick Allies  
Delphian DCD34184 64:38 mins

Siglo de Oro is a choir founded by London-based students, and this is its first recording. It's a debut with a difference, as half of the tracks are advent antiphons, newly commissioned and scored for voices and saxophone. The combination works grippingly in Will Todd's *O Wisdom*, where Sam Corkin's soprano saxophone zig-zags dramatically through the vocal textures. He turns to the alto instrument for Francis Pott's more ruminative *O Key of David* and Ralph Allwood's ecstatic *O Virgin of virgins*. A novel, ungimmicky project, vividly executed.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



## THE STORY OF NINE LESSONS AND CAROLS

DVD 2014 service in Truro

Cathedral; plus CD of the 1880 service reconstruction

Truro Cathedral Choir/Christopher Gray  
Regent REGDVD004  
DVD: 112:13 mins; plus CD: 59:23 mins

King's College, Cambridge made the service of Nine Lessons and Carols famous, but it started at Truro Cathedral in Cornwall. This special package tells the story. A half-hour DVD documentary explains how Edward White Benson, the Cathedral's first Bishop, initially conceived the Nine Lessons format, and how the original 1880 service was reconstructed for the CD recording that is also included. The DVD also features an unobtrusively filmed record of Truro's 2014 service, including readings, prayers and congregational sections. A treasurable insight into the development of a quintessentially English tradition.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

## IN BRIEF

Reviewed by Terry Blain

### ADESTE FIDELES

Christmas carols from Her Majesty's Chapel Royal  
Choir of Her Majesty's Chapel Royal / Huw Williams  
Signum SIGCD460 72:19 mins

It's good to hear this unique, 17-voice choir in a disc of mostly familiar favourites, recorded at St James's Palace. Forthright and lusty performances, if lacking in finer shadings.

PERFORMANCE ★★★  
RECORDING ★★★

### A CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

Works by Holst, Prokofiev, Rutter, Williams, Darke, Ireland, Poston et al  
Halle Choirs and Orchestra/Stephen Bell  
Halle CDHLL7545 76:04 mins

Glitz, studio-recorded instrumentals complement live choral performances from the Halle's 2014 Christmas celebrations. The singing is hearty if unsubtle; you probably had to be there on the evening.

PERFORMANCE ★★★  
RECORDING ★★★

### JUBILO

Works by JS Bach, Corelli, Fasch & Torelli  
Alison Balsom (trumpet); Academy of Ancient Music; Choir of King's College, Cambridge/Stephen Cleobury  
Warner 90295924652 54:15 mins

Concertos by Corelli and Fasch, a Torelli sonata, and bits of Bach comprise trumpet player Alison Balsom's latest recital. The solo playing gleams with lustre, but the musical connections with Christmas are peripheral.

PERFORMANCE ★★★  
RECORDING ★★★

### TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

Close-harmony arrangements of Christmas favourites  
The King's Men  
King's College KGSO017 46:30 mins

Members of the King's College Choir, Cambridge offer a doo-woppy, close-harmony anthology of seasonal favourites – a warmly enjoyable complement to that mulled wine moment.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

# ORCHESTRAL

Michael Tilson Thomas and the *San Francisco Symphony* reveal the intricate detail of Debussy's late orchestral masterpieces; Howard Shelley discovers unexpected affinities between Fauré and Poulenc; and Valery Gergiev relishes the colours and contrasts in Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*

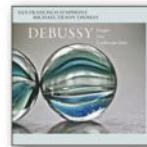
## BBC MUSIC ORCHESTRAL CHOICE

### Prodigious Prokofiev

Andrew Litton triumphs in Symphonies Nos 4 and 7, says David Nice



SCALING NEW HEIGHTS:  
Andrew Litton makes sense  
of Prokofiev's revisions



#### DEBUSSY

Images; Jeux; La plus que lente

San Francisco Symphony/

Michael Tilson Thomas

San Francisco Symphony SFS 0069 (hybrid CD/SACD) 60:21 mins

This is a delicious triptych of Debussy's mature orchestral works, all written in the couple of years before the start of the First World War. Michael Tilson Thomas has a long and illustrious pedigree in Debussy, and it shows in the control and care taken over nuances of texture while keeping sight of the whole – no mean feat in these exceptionally challenging works. No wonder that, while almost always appearing complete on disc, the orchestral *Images* are often heard as isolated movements in the concert hall. In Tilson Thomas's hands, each interlocking phrase and brush of colour can be heard emerging from the San Francisco Symphony, aided by the detailed, yet natural surround sound. The opening of *Iberia* cracks into life with stunning immediacy, the strings and woodwind waft dreamily in 'Les parfums de la nuit', and everything bursts into glorious, dazzling life in 'Rondes de printemps'.

Occasionally speeds are just a shade on the steady side, resulting in a substantial gear change to ensure the end of *Iberia* is suitably rousing. Tilson Thomas describes *Jeux* in the booklet as an 'X-rated dance', so it is a pity the strings are not more teasing in their decoration of the ethereal woodwind chords near the opening, and the general movement could be more lithe. Nonetheless, there is some wonderful characterisation, and each moment counts in a work that seems to end all too soon. *La plus que lente*, a personal favourite of Debussy's, provides a charmingly insouciant conclusion to an enjoyable disc. Christopher Dingle

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

★★★★  
★★★★



#### PROKOFIEV

Symphony No. 4 (1947 version);  
Symphony No. 7

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra/  
Andrew Litton  
BIS BIS-2134 (hybrid CD/SACD) 81:58 mins  
With this golden performance of the revised Fourth Symphony, Prokofiev's Soviet-era rearmament of music from the ballet *The Prodigal Son*, Andrew Litton's already fine championship of the composer scales new heights. The deep and broad BIS recording scores over Neeme Järvi's Royal Scottish National Orchestra version, with truer and less reverberant sound.

But it's not about sound alone, although that allows even the more stop-gappy passages of the 1947 expansion of the much shorter 1930 Fourth Symphony to weave a spell. Litton's mastery shows in the immediate contrasts of broad, epic opening and razor-sharp

#### Handsome, songful breadth is balanced with sheer naughtiness

*Allegro* mechanics. He never rushes, and allows theatrical contrasts to speak for themselves. Even the much-extended slow movement works completely, including the piano's dubious decoration of the main theme in homage to Ravel's G major Concerto, thanks to the depth of the lower string sound

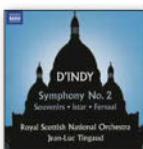
and the discretion of the keyboard. The finale careers vividly towards its acid apotheosis, though is there any precedent for Litton's decision to bring back the first movement's colossal woodstrokes here?

For the Seventh, Litton gives us two finales – one with the quiet ending, one with the extra romp for popular acclaim. This, too, applies lessons of handsome, songful breadth and sheer naughtiness in equal proportions, with heartbreakingly beautiful solos from the Bergen woodwind.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

#### ON THE WEBSITE

Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the [BBC Music Magazine website](http://www.classical-music.com)  
[www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)

**D'INDY****Symphony No. 2; Souvenirs; Istar; Prelude to Fervaal**Royal Scottish National Orchestra/Jean-Luc Tingaud  
Naxos 8.573522 80:03 mins

Of the four works recorded here, the symphonic variations *Istar* are by some way the best known and, as it happens, the best played. The two factors though are not wholly unrelated, in my view because the erotic nature of the story in which, at each of the Seven Doors of the Dark Abode the goddess Istar must, to release her captive lover, remove one of her garments until she is naked, undoubtedly appealed to d'Indy, whose early letters to a loved one give the lie to the widespread view of him as a crusty old pedant. We can hear the negative side of his amorous nature in the bitter *Souvenirs*, written after the sudden death of his first wife: Tingaud does his best with the piece, but the mental disarray shows.

In the Prelude to *Fervaal*, we rather miss any sense of mystery, partly because some of the playing is on the loud side – *Fervaal* is here depicted dreaming of his beloved, so some dynamic discretion is called for. But the quality of the music does make one wonder whether the opera might possibly be revived, despite d'Indy's Wagnerian habit of sliding out of expected cadences. Certainly the powerful, impressive Second Symphony deserves to be heard more often and, despite one or two balance problems at climaxes and a less than pre-eminent trumpet at the final entry of the fugue subject in the last movement, this overall is an honest and enjoyable interpretation.

Roger Nichols

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★**FAURÉ • POULENC**Fauré Pavane; Masques et Bergamasques Suite  
Poulenc: Aubade; Sinfonietta  
Västerås Sinfonietta/Howard Shelley  
DB Productions dBCD177 67 mins

If Fauré, so far as we know, never pronounced about Poulenc's music,

**SURE-HANDED POULENC:**  
Howard Shelley finds the music's neo-classical grace

Poulenc claimed that some of the modulations in *La bonne chanson* actually made him feel ill. So pairing off the two composers may at first sight seem a touch wilful. But here it works splendidly, not least because Howard Shelley treats them both without any sentimental swooning, thereby bringing out the Baroque architecture that underpins their Romantic surfaces. Shelley observes in his liner note that Poulenc was fond of the marking 'sans rubato', and duly follows this instruction, to excellent effect. *Aubade* comes over, as it should despite its slender forces, as a truly powerful, desperate work, the fruit of the first of Poulenc's many depressive episodes, with the tapping minor thirds of the final bars of *Oedipus Rex* well to the fore. The virtuosic piano part is in good hands too, ranging from the elaborately skittish to the massively chordal.

In the Sinfonietta, Shelley manages the sometimes tricky orchestral balances with an equally sure hand – what a delightful piece this is, this time the *Oedipus Rex* contribution coming from what Stravinsky called its 'mortality tarantella'. Fauré in neo-classical mood likewise benefits from this unfussy treatment, with his long melodic lines beautifully shaped and some exquisite woodwind playing. Altogether the disc succeeds absolutely in its declared intention of showing how, in their different idioms, two of France's greatest composers dealt with what Debussy called 'the ghost of old Klingsor'.

Roger Nichols

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★**MAHLER****Symphony No. 10 (performing version by Gamzou)**Seattle Symphony/Thomas Dausgaard  
Seattle Symphony SSM 1011 71:54 mins

Though Deryck Cooke was neither the first nor the last to attempt a performing version of Mahler's sketches and drafts of the symphony he was working on in his last summer, the edition Cooke elaborated, with the help of the conductor Berthold Goldschmidt and the composer-brothers David and Colin Matthews, has proved by far the most performed and recorded – this latest release of a live account by the Seattle Symphony under Thomas Dausgaard must be around the 20th on CD.

It is also one of the finest. Because Mahler left his five movement form in such varying degrees of sketchiness and textural filling out, and because it was composed against a background of marital crisis – as witnessed by the anguished comments he scattered through the manuscript – the score can too easily come over as a mix of apocalyptic moments and sometimes less than convincing in-filling. Here, by an exceptional command of long-term tempo relationships Dausgaard manages to unify the symphony into single whole. Without loss of intensity, it emerges as not only a psychological document but an orchestral classic – fully realised

by the Seattle Symphony, long an adventurous outfit but here sounding like one of the world's great orchestras in a warm, spacious yet finely focused recording. *Bayan Northcott*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★

★★★★

★★★★

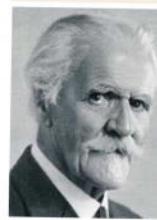
**MAHLER****Symphony No. 10 (performing version by Gamzou)**

International Mahler Orchestra/

Yoel Gamzou

Wergo WER 5122 2 79:29 mins

This latest 'realisation and elaboration' of Mahler's drafts – the sixth to date – is patently a labour of love and homage, to judge by the transcendental awe with which the young Israeli conductor Yoel Gamzou writes about late Mahler in the CD booklet. And he has come up with some interesting variants on the Cooke version, such as giving the final 28 bars to the strings alone. But he has also added some over-the-top extravagances, such as recalling the finale's introductory bass drum thumps one last time at the movement's climatic dissonance, backed with tam-tam, as a corny Blow of Fate. And finely though the International Mahler Orchestra that he founded play, neither performance nor recording will quite do.

**BACKGROUND TO...****Vincent D'Indy**

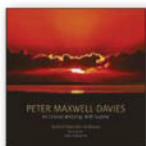
(1851-1931)

On Duparc's advice, D'Indy studied under Franck at the Paris Conservatoire from 1872. To supplement his studies, he became the Colonne Orchestra's second percussionist, and from 1875 until 1879 was chorus master of the Concerts Colonne. Duparc had also introduced D'Indy to Wagner, and on making his first visit to the Bayreuth festival in 1876 D'Indy became a fervent admirer. In 1894 he co-founded the Schola Cantorum, subsequently teaching composition at its music school, becoming its sole director in 1911.

So concerned is Gamzou to heighten expression, that every other upbeat becomes a *ritardando*, repeatedly impeding forward momentum, while the contrasts between loud and soft – enhanced, presumably at the conductor's behest, by the huge dynamic range of the recording – mean that in order to hear some of the more shadowy *pianissimos* at all, one boosts the volume, only to be blasted out of the room by an ensuing *fortissimo*. Worth hearing, but no real challenge to earlier recensions of Mahler's sketches. *Bayan Northcott*

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★  
★★★



### MAXWELL DAVIES

**An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise; Concert Overture: Ebb of Winter; Hill Runes; Last Door of Light; Farewell to Stromness**

Sean Shibe (guitar); Scottish Chamber Orchestra/Ben Gernon  
*Linn CKD 534 59 mins*

The orchestral works *Ebb of Winter* and *Last Door of Light* were both written in Maxwell Davies's old age. While neither strays beyond his familiar territory of Orkney landscape, environmental concern, and tight-reined orchestral rhetoric, each is superbly imagined nonetheless, with the intersection of intricate construction and ultra-clear part-writing that was uniquely this composer's. Aficionados will not mind hearing, yet again, those trademark Maxwell Davies devices of whooping horn *glissandos* and hyperactive chattering trumpets, especially when delivered with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra's bombproof expertise; and Ben Gernon's conducting of both works is forthright and immaculate.

The beautifully executed guitar interludes are supplied by Edinburgh's Sean Shibe; *Hill Runes* is based on a cryptic five-stanza poem by Orkney poet George Mackay Brown, while *Farewell to Stromness* is an arrangement by Timothy Walker (the guitarist of Maxwell Davies's Fires of London group) of the piano original. *An Orkney Wedding, With Sunrise* depends on the presence of a live audience for its riotous goings-on to come across best; not even orchestral playing as scintillating as this, with brilliant recorded sound to match, can quite compensate for an inevitable loss of atmosphere in



FORTHRIGHT AND IMMACULATE:  
Ben Gernon conducts a colourful  
range of late Maxwell Davies

Edinburgh's otherwise empty Usher Hall. *Malcolm Hayes*

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★★  
★★★★★



### MOZART

**Symphonies Nos 39-41**

Australian Chamber Orchestra/  
Richard Tognetti  
*ABC Classics 4812880 93.57 mins (2 discs)*

In a crowded market, this pair of discs of Mozart's last three symphonies stands out, and will, I imagine, prove controversial. In his candid notes to the performances, which are live, though without any audience noise, Richard Tognetti recalls playing these works under Frans Brüggen, of whom he says 'he wasn't just "dabbling antiseptic Dettol" on the music as you sometimes get with English so-called specialists in early music' (Who can Tognetti be thinking of?). And certainly these accounts are pretty merciless affairs, which I found bracing even if I sometimes recoiled from the ferocity of the attack. The opening bars of the *Jupiter* (No. 41) positively bark at you, and the harsh dissonances in the introduction to No. 39 have never before been as harsh as this. On the other hand, Tognetti slows down, regularly, before a lyrical subject, and in general lets tempos ebb and flow in an unfashionable way.

Oddly, when he repeats the minuets of the symphonies, he takes their

own repeats as well, a superfluous procedure – but he doesn't take the repeat of the development in the last movement of the *Jupiter*, which I regard as mandatory. So there is plenty to be surprised about in these performances, but I found them dramatic and enlivening more than any I have heard of these works for many years. Just prepare to be startled. *Michael Tanner*

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★★  
★★★★★



### PROKOFIEV

**Romeo and Juliet**

Oslo Philharmonic/Vasily Petrenko  
*LAWO Classics LWC 1105 144.48 mins (2 discs)*

The first impression is very positive: the Introduction – warmly expressive, flexible and exuding interpretative confidence – promises an outstanding performance. Romeo's opening dance is maybe a touch too jaunty – he is, after all, meant to be still recovering from his infatuation with Rosaline. Yet within a few numbers Vasily Petrenko suggests a greater than usual range to the ballet's character, from the first street brawl (the dissonant horn harmonies suitably bruising) to the pompously brisk march which follows 'The Duke's Command' (about twice the speed of any other performance). All the

main characters are vividly drawn – Juliet lively yet definitely a child at her first appearance, Romeo impetuous and ardent at the balcony scene (Prokofiev's swirl of colours at the height of 'Love Dance' vividly realised); and all the supporting male characters – gentle Friar Laurence apart – swaggering and full of the brittle wit and aggression of youth.

The main caveat is that Petrenko here uses the corrupt Soviet Bolshevik Theatre edition of the score. This does not affect Act I, but from Act II there is some particularly heavy-handed reinforcement of the orchestral scoring, many of the dances weighted down by extra string doublings, percussion and brass to rather 'shouty' effect rather than Prokofiev's more varied conception. The replacement of the oboe solo at the opening of 'Dance of the Five Couples' with blasting trumpets is particularly crass. A pity, because otherwise this is a very fresh and vibrant new account, the first and final acts as great as any available. *Daniel Jaffé*

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★★  
★★★★★



### TCHAIKOVSKY

**The Nutcracker; Symphony No. 4**

Mariinsky Orchestra/Valery Gergiev  
*Mariinsky MAR 0593 (hybrid CD/SACD) 129.02 mins (2 discs)*

Way back in 1998, Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra released a compelling if occasionally hard-driven account of *The Nutcracker*. This new version is not quite as unyielding with more measured tempos adopted for certain dances. Yet the impeccable sense of structural continuity and pacing, which characterised the earlier recording, remains intact, and once again Gergiev paints Tchaikovsky's dream-world in the boldest colours, from the dark subterranean sounds that announce the exciting battle scene in Act I to the magical and glistening bright lights in the Land of Sweets in Act II. The Mariinsky Orchestra plays the score with theatrical verve and virtuosity, and the crystal-clear recording really brings out all the subtle inner details of Tchaikovsky's orchestration.

I wish I could be equally enthusiastic about the Fourth Symphony. Things don't get off to the best start with the fuzzy articulation of the horn triplets in the fate motif,

and there are other moments where the ensemble is a little shaky. As in his Philips recording with the Vienna Philharmonic, Gergiev phrases the main thematic idea of the first movement rather lugubriously, and seems intent on ignoring Tchaikovsky's marking of *Moderato con anima*, let alone his secondary instruction that it should have the movement of a waltz. In holding back at this point, Gergiev is able to whip up tension with even greater ferocity at the climaxes, but the constant fluctuations in tempo distort the movement's organic cohesion. Gergiev lingers, too, in the mournful string melody that follows the oboe solo in the second movement. But here, at least, the strategy is more convincing, bringing greater pathos to the music than is often the case. *Erik Levi*

## PERFORMANCE

**THE NUTCRACKER****SYMPHONY NO. 4****RECORDING****MUSICA VIVA 22****Ligeti: Lontano; Murail: Le déshenchantement du monde; Benjamin: Palimpsests**Pierre-Laurent Aimard (piano); Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra/ George Benjamin  
Neos 11422 (hybrid CD/SACD) 62:17 mins

This is special. Three utterly captivating, ear-tickling pieces by composers from successive generations in superlative performances from Munich's ever enticing Musica Viva concerts. Ligeti's *Lontano* is the established work, the sustained remoteness of its slow-moving kaleidoscope imbued here with a remarkable radiance by the Bavarian Radio Symphony under George Benjamin. A linked diptych from the turn of the century, Benjamin's own *Palimpsests* is typically gripping, with multi-layered textures of varying speeds and characters colliding, merging or bouncing off each other in ways that are superficially chaotic, yet ultimately drawn from the same well. While Benjamin's earlier recording of the work (Nimbus) was impressive, it is superseded by this exceptional performance which, like the other works, is recorded live in vibrant surround sound capturing a genuine sense of atmosphere and tense excitement not undermined by the occasional cough.

The centrepiece of the disc is the world premiere performance of

Tristan Murail's impressive piano concerto *Le déshenchantement du monde* with the ever-sensational Pierre-Laurent Aimard as soloist. The scale and gestures of the work suggest the grand Romantic pianists and it is no surprise that Murail had Liszt's First Piano Concerto and B minor Sonata in mind. To these could be added elements of Scriabin, Bartók and Messiaen, along with Murail's own rich spectral soundworld, laid especially bare at the opening. There are delicate, shimmering moments and also galumphing bombast, building energy that is sometimes dissipated slowly, but often released in dizzying flurries. Like the Benjamin and Ligeti it is an enthralling masterpiece. *Christopher Dingle*

PERFORMANCE



RECORDING



**NOW COMES BEAUTY**  
**Commissions from The English Music Festival: Curtis, D Matthews, Carr, P Lewis, Pickard, Blackford, Lane, Wright & Owen Norris**  
Roderick Williams (baritone), Rupert Marshall-Luck (violin), David Owen Norris (piano); BBC Concert Orchestra/ Gavin Sutherland, Owain Arwel Hughes  
EM Records EMR CD 037-8  
11:05 mins (2 discs)

It wasn't that long ago that Grayson Perry described beauty as 'the elephant in the room' in modern art. Now here are nine British composers who, in their very different ways, are determined to give that elephant a hearty embrace. We can easily forget how much courage such a stance would have taken until almost the end of the last century. It certainly did when David Matthews wrote his sumptuous and subtle *White Nights* in 1980, for me the stand-out piece in this collection. If you didn't know the date though, you'd probably guess it was one of the newest works in the collection – along, perhaps, with John Pickard's grittily eloquent *Binyon Songs* and Christopher Wright's darkly brooding *Legend*.

Some of this music could easily originate from a world in which Vaughan Williams, Malcolm Arnold, Eric Coates and even Richard Addinsell were still contemporaries. Is that a problem? Only if you want to be, and presumably for ideological rather than musical reasons. A great deal of it is very enjoyable, and perhaps most encouraging of all is the sense that something genuinely new and

fresh – rather than just superficially novel – could emerge from this kind of musical 'back to basics' attitude. The performances have warmth, polish and conviction, and the recordings are very good too. *Stephen Johnson*

PERFORMANCE



RECORDING

**REFLECTIONS**

**Britten: Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge; Vaughan Williams: Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis; Stravinsky: Apollon musagète**  
Trondheim Solistene  
2L 2L-125-SABD (SACD plus Blu-ray audio)  
70:03 mins

This is another glorious disc from the Trondheim Solistene. Britten's *Variations on a theme of Frank Bridge* is a natural next step after the ensemble's phenomenal recording of the *Simple Symphony*. As is the norm for the enterprising Norwegian 2L label, the performances are captured in state-of-the-art sound and presented both on hybrid SACD and Blu-ray Audio, the latter offering up to 9.1 surround, though 'old-fashioned' 5.1 still sounds pretty extraordinary, and an excellent stereo mix has not been overlooked. Such audiophile gobbledegook is not superficial stardust, but informs the entire approach, the ensemble being arranged in a circle around the microphones, creating a visceral immersive experience in which the listener is at the centre of marvellous performances.

All this brings out the playful dialogue of, for instance, 'Calliope's Variation' in Stravinsky's *Apollon Musagète* or the 'Aria Italiana' in the Britten Variations in a way never normally experienced. The intensity of the sustained string playing in the latter's 'Funeral March' is both thrilling and moving, so it comes as a surprise that the work's closing moments are a touch mundane. With its use of acoustical space, Vaughan Williams's *Tallis Fantasia* is made for surround sound, and, even if a larger main ensemble would provide an even greater sonic contrast, the placing of the more distant soloists works well. The Trondheim Solistene ensure *Apollon Musagète* is suitably elegant and really dances, releasing the rapt energy of the Vaughan Williams, while its wry interplay is the perfect foil for the Britten. *Christopher Dingle*

PERFORMANCE



RECORDING

**REISSUES**

Reviewed by Michael Tanner

**HAYDN • MOZART**

**Mozart: Le nozze di Figaro – overture; Symphony No. 40; Haydn: Symphonies Nos 88 & 94**  
Vienna & Berlin PO/Furtwangler  
Praga Digitals PRD/DSD350126 (1948-51)  
73:18 mins



The sound here belies the performances' ages, and you'll be hard pressed to find more alive accounts than this passionate Mozart 40th, and two of Haydn's most popular symphonies.

PERFORMANCE



RECORDING

**MOZART**

**Symphonies Nos 34, 39 & 40; Eine kleine Nachtmusik; Le nozze di Figaro – Overture; Mass in C minor**  
Los Angeles Philharmonic; Israel Philharmonic; LPO/Zubin Mehta  
Eloquence v (1974-98) 110:30 mins (2 discs)



A curious ragbag of Mozart performances with three contrasting orchestras, but all of them bearing the mark of Mehta, whose reading of the works is beefy but unmemorable. Von Otter is great.

PERFORMANCE



RECORDING

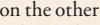
**BRUCKNER • WAGNER**

**Bruckner: Symphony No. 4; Wagner: Die Meistersinger – Prelude to Act 1**  
Vienna Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra/Zubin Mehta  
Eloquence 4613562 (1967/70) 73:43 mins

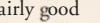


Surely the Vienna Philharmonic has never sounded so dull as in this Prelude to *Die Meistersinger*. The LA Philharmonic, on the other hand, is superb in this fairly good reading of Bruckner's *Romantic*.

PERFORMANCE



RECORDING

**BRUCKNER**

**Symphony No. 7**  
Orchestre des Champs-Elysées/  
Philippe Herreweghe  
Harmonia Mundi HMA 901857 (2004)  
59:54 mins



This disc came as a big surprise. Though mistakenly omitting the cymbal clash at the climax of the second movement, this is a rich, warm and deeply felt account of this masterpiece.

PERFORMANCE



RECORDING



# CONCERTO

Violinist *Carolin Widmann* brings a welcome lightness of touch to Schumann and warmth to Mendelssohn; and *Alisa Weilerstein* proves naturally suited to Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto

## BBC MUSIC CONCERTO CHOICE

### Glossy and gnarly Brahms

Joshua Bell and Steven Isserlis are ideal co-soloists, says *Helen Wallace*



PURE CHAMBER MUSIC:  
Steven Isserlis and Joshua  
Bell with the ASMF



#### BRAHMS • SCHUMANN

Brahms: Double Concerto;  
Piano Trio No. 1; Schumann:  
Violin Concerto – Langsam  
(arr. Britten)

Joshua Bell (violin), Steven Isserlis (cello), Jeremy Denk (piano);  
Academy of St Martin in the Fields  
Sony 88985321792 76:32 mins

It's often been said of Brahms that his chamber music was orchestral, and vice versa. Here's an unconduted Double Concerto transformed into pure chamber music, in which two old friends spar amicably with the like support of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. There's an intriguing, subtly competitive friction between violinist Joshua Bell

and cellist Steven Isserlis, the one so glossy and fluent, the latter more gnarly and individual, each audibly inspiring – and often provoking – the other. Just listen to the passionate antiphonal arioso phrases in the *Largo*, in which Isserlis injects fiery temper into Bell's sweetly consoling cantabile.

#### Joshua Bell and Steven Isserlis audibly inspire and provoke the other

For all its sombre bluster, this concerto is lightly scored, much of the turbulence generated by the soloists themselves. The *Allegro* feels like a live performance, tripping lightly, the orchestra piling in with zestful enthusiasm. The weird little salon waltz arrives like a spontaneous improvisation, while the coda has rarely sounded so celestial.

The *Langsam* from Schumann's Violin Concerto, arranged by Britten, appears as a heart-catching interlude, its opening aria eloquent in Isserlis's hands against the limping syncopations of strings.

Isserlis makes a good case for the 1854 version of Brahms's Op. 8 Piano Trio, written at the height of his infatuation with Clara, and including two significant Lied references, later excised. The *Allegro*'s baffling fugues and wandering song and dance interludes fall into place in their hands. Jeremy Denk, mercurial in the *scherzo*, brings out the *Adagio*'s rapt, visionary strangeness.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

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#### J ADAMS • HARRIS

Violin Concertos

Tamsin Waley-Cohen (violin); BBC Symphony Orchestra/Andrew Litton  
Signum Classics SIGCD468 62:22 mins

Spanning some 50 years, these two concertos capture both the evolution and enduring spirit of American classical music. Tamsin Waley-Cohen brings magnetic performances and an enthusiast's passion to this splendid disc: the soloist herself traced Roy Harris's 1949 score to Washington's Library of Congress after discrepancies among orchestral parts saw the work's premiere cancelled and the piece little performed since.

Born in 1898 to an Oklahoma farming family, Harris followed a musical trajectory that neatly encapsulates the development of 20th-century American composition, encompassing rural roots, studies on the West Coast, a spell in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, and an eventual return to the states to pursue a distinctly 'American' music. His Violin Concerto duly bubbles with folk melodies, modal harmonies and open-hearted expression, and Waley-Cohen and the BBC Symphony Orchestra bring tremendous warmth and verve to their performance.

Perhaps America's most celebrated living composer, John Adams was similarly raised in a rural community before finding his creative voice in 1970s San Francisco. His Violin Concerto (1992-3) is complex and rhapsodic, diverging from the composer's post-minimalist style but no less radiant and appealing. Adams coined the term 'hypermelody' to describe the intense motion of the solo line and Waley-Cohen's laser-bright tone and effortless agility drives this outstanding account.

*Kate Wakeling*  
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★

★★★★★  
★★★★★



## MENDELSSOHN • SCHUMANN

### Violin Concertos

Carolin Widmann (violin);  
Chamber Orchestra of Europe  
ECM 481 2635 59:26 mins

We know from his diary that Schumann completed his Violin Concerto on 1 October 1853. The following year he heard it played through by its dedicatee, Joseph Joachim, who dismissed the piece – Schumann's last orchestral score – as 'morbid brooding,' and never performed it in public. So much did he regard it as an embarrassment that he presented the autograph score to the Prussian State Library only on condition that it was not to be published until 100 years after Schumann's death. Brahms

Certainly, the Concerto finds Schumann staring into the abyss, but its slow movement, in particular, has an otherworldly atmosphere that is profoundly affecting. Carolin Widmann and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe give a deeply-felt account of it, and are no less expressive in the beautiful second subject of the opening movement. Only the finale remains problematic, especially if taken at the slow tempo indicated by Schumann. Widmann keeps it as light

as possible, but it's hard to prevent the polonaise rhythm from lumbering.

The Mendelssohn Concerto has had a much less chequered history, and was recognised right from its first performance in 1845 as one of the pinnacles of the repertoire. Widmann plays it with warmth and admirable fluency, but perhaps the presence of a conductor would have allowed her to inject a bit more passion into the music: it's all just a touch impersonal, and the elfin finale, although admirably clear, is a little on the safe side. *Misha Donat*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★



## SHOSTAKOVICH

### Cello Concertos Nos 1 & 2

Alisa Weilerstein (cello);  
Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra/  
Pablo Heras-Casado  
Decca 483 0835 60:52 mins

Shostakovich's two cello concertos present such different challenges, it's a rare cellist who shines as brightly in both. Alisa Weilerstein is well-matched to the First Concerto: fierce, tight and articulate, this account fairly crackles. She etches a burning line, powered by a rhythmic elasticity that trumps any degree of glistening tonal beauty. Through the first movement she ratchets up tension, picking up the glaring theme from the horns, transforming it from a plaintive wail into a scream.

There's no let-up in intensity in a *Moderato* of impressive sweep, and a strong sense of apprehension keeps her cadenza compelling. But like many of today's virtuosos – including Truls Mørk – there's a prepared precision to her manic scales which precludes a headlong leap into the fire. Whatever the flaws, Rostropovich's early recordings capture a performer risking all.

The tragic-comic Concerto No. 2, written while Shostakovich was recovering from a heart attack, is a harder nut to crack. High seriousness marks Weilerstein's lyrical first movement: where the texture suddenly thins, Pablo Heras-Casado and his forces create chamber-like episodes of luminous intimacy. Weilerstein spins a subtle narrative thread, holding her nerve magnificently in the blazing fanfares of the *Scherzo*, unleashing an assertive fury; I love the way she almost swings the middle section with its wild swoops and jazzy grand-standing.

She brings a thrilling edginess to the finale, but it can't quite compare with Pieter Wispelwey (Channel), who limps through it with a sinister, supercilious grin, evoking more precisely the chill hospital ward in which it ends, machines ticking, chest rattling. *Helen Wallace*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★



## SHOSTAKOVICH

### Cello Concerto No. 1

### WEINBERG

### Cello Concerto in D minor

### LUTOSŁAWSKI

### Little Suite

Nicolas Altstaedt (cello); Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin/  
Michał Nesterowicz  
Channel Classics CCS 38116 71:50 mins

The chief draw of this attractive Russo-Polish themed disc is the Cello Concerto of Mieczysław Weinberg, himself a composer with one foot in each country. Born in Warsaw, he escaped the Nazis by heading to the Soviet Union, where he spent the rest of his life and enjoyed a close association with Shostakovich. One of his undisputed masterpieces and a work of warm-hearted emotional impact, his Cello Concerto shared a similar fate with Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto, written around the same time. In 1948, when Stalin's cultural clampdown was delivered in the form of the Zhdanov Decree, both concertos had to be put aside. Weinberg's score was not heard until 1957, when it was premiered by Rostropovich (who later recorded it). Two years later, Rostropovich also premiered the Shostakovich concerto that opens this recording.

Here the Weinberg is wonderfully played by Nicolas Altstaedt, who brings tone both muscular and soft-grained to illuminate the work's contrasting facets – including a dash of klezmer in the second movement. The German-French cellist sounds less sinewy than many in the Shostakovich, yet this is a notably warm performance thanks to good rapport with the orchestra under Michał Nesterowicz.

Lutosławski's *Little Suite*, later regarded by its composer as marginal, was written in 1950 under Poland's own set of socialist-realist strictures and circumvents them by using folk material from the country's

south-east. Aptly connecting the two concertos, it is a nice sorbet in the middle. *John Allison*

**PERFORMANCE**  
**RECORDING**

★★★★  
★★★★



## A VIOLIN FOR ALL SEASONS

### Vivaldi: The Four Seasons; R Panufnik: Four World Seasons

Graham Bradshaw (Tibetan singing bowl), David Wright (harpsichord); BBC SO/Tasmin Little (violin)  
Chandos CHSA 5175 (hybrid CD/SACD)  
62:38 mins

With so many recordings of *The Four Seasons* around, a new one has either to be very special, or provide unique added value to stand a chance of being noticed. Although Tasmin Little isn't a Baroque specialist there is some influence from historically informed performance: rubato is used discreetly, and vibrato, although more present than might be expected from an 'authentic' performance, is subtly varied. Linking passages are especially imaginative, not least because of the way Little and harpsichordist David Wright respond to each other; and Wright's solo link between the first and second movements of 'Autumn' is a delight. In some of the faster passages, there could be more precision of ensemble in the orchestra – a result of Little's wish to use a larger ensemble than usual, perhaps – but these are engaging performances, captured in warm but detailed sound.

Added value comes in the shape of Roxanna Panufnik's recent take on the seasons, commissioned by Little as a companion for the Vivaldi, and visiting four countries, with a flavour of their traditional music. The opening 'Albanian Autumn' dances vigorously, then subsides into a soulful love song before a Tibetan singing bowl heralds 'Winter': a subdued, thinly scored movement. 'Spring in Japan' gradually burgeons into blossom and birdsong, while the 'Indian Summer' has a colourful opulence reflected by raga modes. Panufnik draws the disparate elements together with inventive musicality, and Little and the orchestra clearly enjoy the rich variety she provides. *Martin Cotton*

**PERFORMANCE**  
**RECORDING**

★★★★  
★★★★

*Hear the BBC Music team give its verdict on this CD on our 'First Listen' podcast, available from iTunes and [www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)*

## BACKGROUND TO...

### Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47)



Mendelssohn wrote several concertos, but it was his E minor Violin Concerto that really captured the popular imagination.

It also helped reshape concerto form for the Romantic era. Rather than waiting for an orchestral introduction, the violin dives straight in. The three movements are then played without a break, in effect making it a through-composed concerto. Mendelssohn wrote the work for his friend Ferdinand David, the leader of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.

# OPERA

*Christian Gerhaher* stars in a superlative production of Berg's *Wozzeck*; plus a rare and truly great Wagner recording from *Klaus Tennstedt*

## BBC MUSIC OPERA CHOICE

### A revolutionary Don Giovanni

Teodor Currentzis strips away years of tradition, says *Anthony Prysor*



#### MOZART

##### Don Giovanni

Dimitris Tiliakos, Vito Priante, Mika Kares, Myrtò Papatanasiu, Kenneth Tarver, Karina Gauvin, Guido Loconsolo, Christina Gansch; MusicAeterna Choir; MusicAeterna/Teodor Currentzis Sony 88985316032 150:10 mins (3 discs)

This version of *Don Giovanni* by the Greek conductor Teodor Currentzis, now based in Perm in Russia, strips away many of our distorting performance habits, and the result is refreshing, revelatory and unsettling. There is no trace of 19th-century vocal assertiveness, nor fear of embellishment. Zerlina's ornamentation in 'Vendrai carino' – sung by soprano Christina Gansch – is, for instance,

#### Currentzis conducts a revelatory and unsettling performance

spectacular. Currentzis's dynamics are scaled right down – there is a lot of piano in Mozart's scores.

On the other hand Teodor Currentzis does pander a little to our modern notions of musical excitement. Certain items are over-fast (a brisk 'Batti Batti' can hardly be an entreaty), the continuo accompaniments are 'sexed up': a nice little jig now prefacing the Zerlina/Leporello duet 'Restati quâ', and the orchestra is kept at modern strength of around 60 players – Mozart had about 30 for *Don Giovanni* in Prague in 1787.



A DRAMATIC DON:  
Dimitris Tiliakos embraces  
the character's dark side

The singers are very good. Dimitris Tiliakos is a dramatic Don – the sudden minor-key passage in 'Fin ch'han dal vino' gets very dark – Vito Priante (Leporello) can act with his voice, Mika Kares (the Commendatore) is stentorian and implacable, and Guido Loconsolo (Masetto) is vocally nimble and petulant as required. Myrtò Papatanasiu (Donna Anna) is movingly poised and fluent in her slightly archaic aria 'Non mi dir', and Kenneth Tarver has great gifts of lyricism. Elvira is not an

easy role but Karina Gauvin has it fully under control and her roulades in the quartet 'Non ti fidar' are ravishing. Do not expect a familiar 'warm bath' experience here; it offers an invigorating shower of fresh new insights.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



#### ON THE WEBSITE

Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the BBC Music Magazine website [www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)



#### BERG

##### DVD Wozzeck

Christian Gerhaher, Brandon Jovanovich, Mauro Peter, Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacke, Lars Woldt, Gun-Brit Barkmin et al; Zurich Opera Chorus; Philharmonia Zurich/Fabio Luisi; dir. Andreas Homoki (Zurich, 2015) Accentus DVD: ACC 20363; Blu-ray: 10363 100:58 mins

Berg is a hard sell, and when Christian Gerhaher fell ill and withdrew from Zurich Opera's concert performance of *Wozzeck* at the Royal Festival Hall in October 2015, the patches of empty seats were like dried grass on a disused playing field. Yet those of us who came to see Leigh Melrose replace Gerhaher heard a reading of such lyricism from Fabio Luisi, Philharmonia Zurich and the rest of the cast that we could only shake our heads.

This DVD of Andreas Homoki's production – sensitively filmed for small screen by Michael Beyer, with a booklet containing interviews with Homoki and Luisi and a transcript of a 1930 radio interview with Berg – explains why that performance was such a success, even without its leading man, costumes, lighting or scenery. Every note and nuance has been interrogated by Luisi and Homoki.

While the Lieder-like beauty of Gerhaher's singing is matchless – he can act too – this is no star vehicle. It is ensemble work of the highest order. In an abstract set of distempered frames that multiply and contract as Wozzeck is emasculated by poverty and powerlessness, Homoki has made over Büchner's grotesques as Kasperl puppets (designs by Michael Levine). Details in the libretto that might ordinarily slip by unnoticed are foregrounded without being sensationalised.

Their lips rouged and cheeks blanched, Wozzeck, Marie (Gun-Brit Barkmin), Andres (Mauro Peter), the Captain (Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacke), the Doctor (Lars Woldt), the Drum Major (Brandon Jovanovich), Margret (Irène Friedli) and the Mad Man (Martin Zyssset) strut and sprawl in thrall to lust, greed, jealousy, rage and syphilis. The relationships are brilliantly drawn, and the murder of Marie is more shocking for its surrealism. The string and woodwind solos are

incisive, and the blossoming of the orchestral interludes as directed by Luisi is almost indecently lovely.

*Anna Picard*

PERFORMANCE  
PICTURE & SOUND

★★★★★  
★★★★★



## DESYATNIKOV

### The Children of Rosenthal

Piotr Migunov, Elena Manistina, Maxim Paster, Vsevolod Grivnov, Vassily Ladyuk, Alexander Teliga, Kristina Mkhitarian, Irina Rubtsova; Bolshoi Theatre Chorus & Orchestra/Alexander Vedernikov  
*Melodiya* MEL CD 10 02432  
131:57 mins (2 discs)

On the principle of there being no such thing as bad publicity, the denunciation of Leonid Desyatnikov's *The Children of Rosenthal* just before its premiere at the Bolshoi Theatre in 2005 can have done no harm. When a member of the Russian Duma called the opera pornographic, he was jumping to an uninformed conclusion; one of the leading characters, Tanya, is a prostitute, but the opera is no more risqué than *La traviata*. Rosenthal himself turns out to be a German-Jewish scientist given shelter by Stalin in order to create human doubles, who in his spare time clones composers. Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, Tchaikovsky and Musorgsky thus all feature, and by the time the action has freewheeled up to 1993 we have also heard every Kremlin leader from Stalin to Yeltsin.

Though this absurdist opera may sound intriguing enough to make one wish Melodiya had filmed it, reviews of the production suggest the decision to release an audio-only recording was probably wise. Desyatnikov is something of a cult composer, yet it is a pity that for its first new opera in a quarter of a century the Bolshoi played things so safe musically. In a score featuring surprisingly little pastiche, the soundworld is mostly Musorgsky Lite. The cast is committed, beginning with the bass Pyotr Migunov's firm-voiced Rosenthal and Kristina Mkhitarian's glowingly sung Tanya.

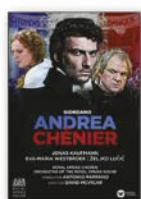
Among the composers, Mozart makes his mark thanks to Vsevolod Grivnov's keenly focused tenor, and Wagner stands out for being a trouser role (Elena Manistina). Alexander Vedernikov conducts as if he believes in the piece. *John Allison*

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★  
★★★



INDECENTLY LOVELY:  
Christian Gerhaher and  
Gun-Brit Barkmin in *Wozzeck*



## GIORDANO

### DVD Andrea Chénier

Zeljko Lučić, John Cunningham, Eva-Maria Westbroek, Denyce Graves, Rosalind Plowright, Peter Coleman-Wright, Jonas Kaufmann, Peter Hoare, Adrian Clarke, Carlo Bosi, Roland Wood, Elena Zilio, Eddie Wade, Yuriy Yurchuk, Jeremy White; Royal Opera House/Antonio Pappano; dir. David McVicar (London, 2015)  
*Warner DVD*: 9029593796;  
*Blu-ray*: 9029593779 123 mins

For too long we've thought of Giordano as a late *verismo* composer with a sharp ear for all the tricks of the style; and of *André Chénier* as a two-number work – Maddalena's aria 'La mamma morta' and the sumptuous final duet when she and Chénier walk to their tumbrel having embraced a mystical union of love and death.

Happily this fine production from the Royal Opera House lays those ancient prejudices to rest. It's intelligently directed by David McVicar, who wisely decides to keep the opera in its original Revolutionary setting but who dresses his cast carefully in the colours and styles of the pre- and post-revolutionary periods. So after Act I it's predominantly reds, white and blues that adorn an all purpose architectural set. McVicar knows that this is much a political opera as a costume drama, so that his poet hero's belief in freedom from state orthodoxy is as pertinent now as it was during the Terror that followed the Revolution.

As so often, McVicar throws a light on secondary characters in the

drama. The Countess de Coigny in sumptuous purple satin is sung to great effect by Rosalind Plowright, as is Elena Zilio's Madelon, the *sans culottes* patriot who gives her grandson to the revolutionary armies. Jonas Kaufmann is a handsome Chénier, though more baritone than Italian tenor in his Act 1 aria – listen to José Carreras who gives a masterclass in how to sing 'Un di all'azzuro spazio'. Never less than compelling on screen, Jonas Kaufmann is a perfect foil to Eva-Maria Westbroek's Maddalena who wrings every last drop of emotion out of 'La mamma morta'. And Zeljko Lučić is a suitably saturnine Gérard. But the man of the hour is Antonio Pappano who conducts the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House as if all their lives depended on it.

*Christopher Cook*

PERFORMANCE  
PICTURE & SOUND  
EXTRAS

★★★★★  
★★★★★  
★★★★★



## MASCAGNI

### DVD Cavalleria rusticana

### LEONCAVALLO

### Pagliacci

Aleksandrs Antonenko, Carmen Giannattasio, Dimitri Platanias, Eva-Maria Westbroek, Elena Zilio; Royal Opera Chorus & Orchestra/Antonio Pappano; dir. Damiano Michieletto (London, 2015)  
*Opus Arte DVD*: OA 1210 D;  
*Blu-ray*: OABD 7200D 153 + 15 mins

Back in 2015, Damiano Michieletto's Royal Opera production of *William*

## REISSUES

Reviewed by George Hall

### KUDA, KUDA:

Famous Russian Arias and Scenes

DVD Glinka, Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky  
Gorchakova, Marusin, Netrebko et al  
*Arthaus* 109246 (1990-2016) 120 mins



Mostly filmed at the Mariinsky with Gergiev conducting, highlights of these extracts include Alexander Golovin's spectacular designs for *Ruslan and Lyudmila* and Graham Vick's staging of *War and Peace*.

PERFORMANCE  
PICTURE & SOUND

★★★★  
★★★★

### INBRUNST IM HERZEN:

Famous German Arias and Scenes

DVD Mozart, Strauss and Wagner  
Fassbaender, Hawata, Te Kanawa, Kollo, Meier, Schäfer, Terfel et al  
*Arthaus* 109244 (1990-2016) 80 mins



The best of this DVD features scenes from Harry Kupfer's *Elektra* starring Brigitte Fassbaender and Eva Marton and conducted by Abbado, and Bryn Terfel's Jokanaan opposite Catherine Malfitano's Salomé.

PERFORMANCE  
PICTURE & SOUND

★★★  
★★★

### CASTA DIVA:

Famous Italian Arias and Scenes

DVD Donizetti, Mozart, Ponchielli, Puccini, Rossini and Verdi  
Alagna, Gheorghiu, Hampson et al  
*Arthaus* 109242 (1990-2016) 140 mins



Choose this for Sutherland as Norma, Lucia, and Leonora in *Trovatore*, plus Gheorghiu and Alagna in Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'amore*, and Ann Murray as Rossini's Cenerentola.

PERFORMANCE  
PICTURE & SOUND

★★★★  
★★★★

### AMOURS DIVINS!

Famous French Arias and Scenes

DVD Gluck, Offenbach and Thomas  
Dessay, Hampson, Kozená, Lott et al  
*Arthaus* 109240 (1990-2016) 130 mins



Highlights include Felicity Lott as Offenbach's Helen of Troy, segments from Robert Wilson's stagings of Gluck's *Alceste* and *Orphée*, plus Natacha Dessay in *Hamlet*.

PERFORMANCE  
PICTURE & SOUND

★★★★  
★★★★

BBC  
RADIO

3

## REISSUES SPECIAL



**UNFORGETTABLE:**  
Maria Callas made the role of *Tosca* her own

## Collectible masterpieces

Record Review's **Andrew McGregor** explores five glossily repackaged archive operas from Warner Classics



This month I've been listening to five great operas in five classic recordings. But after they've been reissued multiple times and digitally remastered, is there really any more 'added value' to be squeezed out of them? For the record company, certainly – but this time around Warner Classics hasn't gone the cheap'n'cheerful route. These editions scream quality and collectability: handsome hard-backed books with contextual

essays, full libretto and translations, complete with dust jackets on the folds of which the Abbey Road engineers describe the challenges of remastering each opera in HD from the original masters.

The earliest features Victoria de los Angeles as a sultry and seductive *Carmen* in Bizet's opera, conducted by Thomas Beecham in Paris in 1958 and 1959 (2564699448; 3 CDs). Part of the problem was the difference in sound between the sessions; there's some residual hiss, but the depth and immediacy is striking. Beecham's feel for Spanish colour and the swagger he gets from his French players is still wonderful.

Mozart's *Don Giovanni* is Carlo Maria Giulini's Abbey Road recording from 1959 (2564699405; 3 CDs), casting dangerous shadows right from a menacing overture. The pacing is a little deliberate, but every phrase has time to speak. Eberhard Wächter makes a grim, gritty *Giovanni*, Joan Sutherland is an affecting *Donna Anna* and, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf's *Elvira* is marvellously haughty.

Mozart's *Magic Flute* is the 1964 Otto Klemperer recording (2564699436; 2 CDs). It feels old-fashioned now:

no dialogue, stately speeds but the cast is stunning – from Lucia Popp's

stratospheric Queen of the Night to Nicolai Gedda's ardent *Tamino* there's not a weak link.

It's the last two I have most issues with. Puccini's *Tosca* (9029598937; 2 CDs) was always a special role for Maria Callas, but this is the 1965 Paris recording conducted by Georges Prêtre, who's disappointingly prosaic.

And finally, Verdi's *La traviata* is Riccardo Muti's digital 1980 recording (2564648318; 2 CDs), hard-driven and short on romance, as Renata Scotti and Alfredo Kraus could never be mistaken for young lovers.

### Here are five great operas in five classic recordings

*Tell* caused the biggest row in London's operatic world in ages, so it must have been a huge relief to the management later that same year when his verismo double bill proved a hit. Michieletto links the two pieces by having characters in one piece reappear (necessarily silently) in the other: during the *Cavalleria* Intermezzo there's a touching encounter between Dionysios Sourbis's Silvio and Carmen Giannattasio's Nedda, while a poster for the production by the touring *Pagliacci* company – which eventually plays on the tiny stage of the local community centre – is visible on the village walls.

Paolo Fantin's sets and Carla Teti's designs identify the period as the 1950s, though the *Cavalleria* Easter procession looks meagre even by the standards of a poor Italian town; but generally Michieletto does an effective job in telling these two powerful, archetypal verismo stories of Italian crimes of passion.

Two singers sing in both operas: Dimitri Platanias makes a brash and brutish Alfio in *Cavalleria* and a thrillingly emphatic Tonio in *Pagliacci*. Aleksandrs Antonenko is not a subtle artist, but the raw energy of both his Canio and his Turiddu makes an impact. Vocally Eva-Maria Westbroek is a somewhat blowsy Santuzza, but Giannattasio's Nedda and Martina Belli's Lola are first-rate.

Antonio Pappano knows exactly how these pieces should go, while the ROH forces play and sing their hearts out in realising them. The picture quality, though, seems unduly dark in places. *George Hall*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★  
**PICTURE & SOUND** ★★★

Christina Pluhar has thus taken on a big challenge. She has tackled this via an effective melding of Baroque opera with indigenous South American folk music, popular song styles, Renaissance instruments and modern choreography, producing a very accessible, readily-assimilated work. The singers, manifesting various styles and vocal weights, acquit themselves well, conveying their characters' differing personalities with clear diction.

Rather oddly, given that the DVD contains the entire opera, filmed in performance, while the CD, at half the length, constitutes a précis, the DVD is packaged as a bonus. The stage production, stylised and colourful, effectively evokes the otherworldly aspects of the tale, leavening the tragic myth with an often amusing surface fairy-tale lightness.

The Spanish libretto is translated into English, French and German in the booklet. The DVD has subtitles in all four languages. *Barry Witherden*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★  
**PICTURE & SOUND (DVD)** ★★★★



### WAGNER

#### Die Walküre: Act 1

René Kollo, Eva-Maria Bundschuh, John Tomlinson; London Philharmonic Orchestra/Klaus Tennstedt (recorded 1991)  
LPO LPO-0092 69:41 mins

Klaus Tennstedt was an ardent Wagnerian, but he left no recording of a complete opera (by anyone, for that matter) and only 'Ring hits' as one of the CDs of extracts, mainly orchestral, is called, and other fragments. So the appearance of this complete Act I, one of the most self-sufficient acts in Wagner's whole oeuvre, is important and turns out to be no disappointment, as the huge applause at the end shows. The chief cause of ecstasy is the inspired playing of the LPO, whose intensity is electrifying: the opening storm is enough to show what we can expect, and despite the broad tempos – this is one of the slowest performances I have heard – tension doesn't resolve until the last off-beat chord.

The only ground for complaint – in a way a serious one, but as with some other great performances, in the end it isn't that worrying – is the strenuous Siegmund of René Kollo, his voice never beautiful and sometimes a yelp:



### PLUHAR

#### Orfeo Chámán

Nahuel Pennisi, Luciana Mancini, Vincenzo Capuzzotto, Emiliano Gonzalez Toro; L'Arpeggiata/Christina Pluhar Erato 9029596969 69:28 mins (CD + DVD)  
Since Orpheus could affect animal, vegetable, mineral, the quick and the dead with his music and poetry, it is hardly surprising that he has fascinated many artists, who easily identify with the mythic figure. Jean Cocteau pretty much made this his life's work, and among the most famous Orphean operas are those by Monteverdi, Gluck, Offenbach, Birtwistle and Glass, who based his on Cocteau's film.

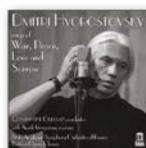
## OPERA REVIEWS

but he respects the text and the score, and brings passion to the role. Eva-Maria Bundschuh had no great career in England, but she is an adequate Sieglinde; while John Tomlinson, early in his Wagnerian career, is a rock-steady baleful Hunding, though he neglects the less hostile side of his role. What matters is that the perfect shape of the act is realised, so that the pulling of the sword from the tree is the punctual climax of all that has gone before. Rarely have I heard it feel so completely that as in this performance, well recorded.

*Michael Tanner*

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★★  
★★★★



**DMITRI HVOROSTOVSKY** sings of War, Peace, Love and Sorrow

Arias from Prokofiev: War and Peace; Rubinstein: The Demon; Tchaikovsky: Iolanta; Mazeppa & The Queen of Spades

Dmitri Hvorostovsky (baritone), Asmik Grigorian (soprano), Irina Shishkova (mezzo-soprano), Vadim Volkov (countertenor), Igor Morozov (tenor), Mikhail Guzhov (bass); Helikon Opera Chorus; Academic State Symphony Orchestra of Russia/Constantine Orbelian Delos DE 3517 53:51 mins

For all his success in Italianate roles Dmitri Hvorostovsky hasn't abandoned his native repertoire. Here he samples major Russian operas that still remain marginal abroad, with a fine young cast including Asmik Grigorian, daughter of celebrated tenor Gegam Grigorian and a star in her own right. In Prokofiev's *War and Peace* the opening scene, a lyrical nocturne, provides a strikingly beautiful duet for her and mezzo Irina Shishkova, framed by Prince Andrei's increasingly ardent reflections. Hvorostovsky recorded this soon after treatment for serious illness, but his familiar rich tone seems undiminished, and it's hard not to sense some extra feeling in Andrei's reaffirmation of life. His voice is rather light for the dastardly Cossack Mazeppa – 'a Ukrainian separatist', the notes call him! – but his forceful delivery carries it off; Duke Robert's amorous paean, from *Iolanta*, suits him better.

In the more familiar *Queen of Spades* he sings Tomsky's ballads, spooky and amorous, with sardonic gusto. Almost unknown in the West beyond a Melodiya re-release, *The*

*Demon* is variable and somewhat verbose, but impressed even Rubinstein's opponent Rimsky-Korsakov. In the final scene the Byronic Demon pursues the virginal Tamara into a convent. Hvorostovsky's silky intensity makes his blend of vampiric passion and vulnerability credibly seductive, and Gregorian's bright-toned resistance understandably desperate.

*Michael Scott Rohan*

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★★  
★★★★



**IN WAR & PEACE:**  
Harmony through Music

Arias by Handel, Leo, Purcell, Jommelli & Monteverdi

Joyce DiDonato (mezzo-soprano); Il Pomo d'Oro/Maxim Emelyanychev Erato 9029592846 79:00 mins

The concept of Joyce Di Donato's latest album is simple. Almost every aria written between the 1640s and the 1750s could be said to be about tension and resolution, if not about war and peace per se. From Purcell's Carthage and Mexico to Handel's Israel, Rome and Egypt, and Monteverdi's Ithaca, the clash of swords is the backdrop to a clash of words in which discord is inevitably resolved.

When contrasted with Anna Prohaska's recital of half a dozen Baroque composers' treatments of the stories of Dido and Cleopatra (reviewed November 2016), DiDonato's programme seems unfocused. Her execution, however, is not. Though the top of her voice is wiry under pressure, her coloratura is tightly sprung, her diction is flawless, and her phrasing of the often underrated poetry is sympathetic and sophisticated. The rarest gems are those from Leonardo Leo's *Andromaca* ('Prendi quel ferro, o barbaro!' is a histrionic tour de force) and Jommelli's proto-Classical *Attilio Regolo* ('Sprezza il furor del vento' and 'Par che di Giubilo'). The subtle shine DiDonato brings to Susanna's 'Crystal streams' (*Susanna*) and the firepower of a skilfully deployed chest register in Storze's 'Scenes of Horror' (*Jephtha*) have more lasting appeal, as does her venomous Agrippina. Il Pomo d'Oro plays with Handelian zip under its new director, Maxim Emelyanychev. *Anna Picard*

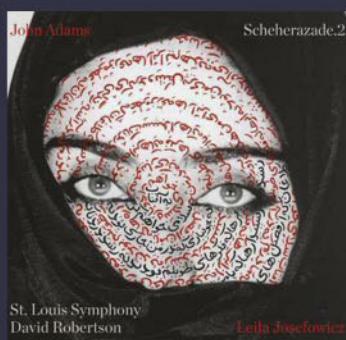
PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★★  
★★★★

## OUT NOW ON NONESUCH RECORDS

### JOHN ADAMS SCHEHERAZADE.2

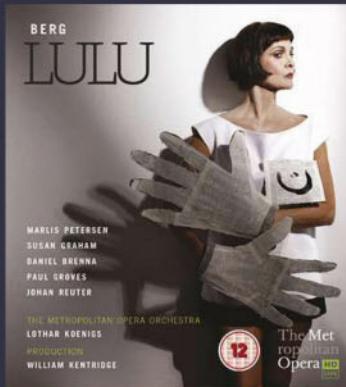
Written for violinist Leila Josefowicz, this recording of Adams's "dramatic symphony" was made during 2016 performances by the St. Louis Symphony, led by David Robertson.



'Scheherazade.2 is at once a violin concerto and an orchestral showpiece. Romance mixes with drama, luscious vistas of Ravel with outbursts of Stravinsky in his spectacular Russian fairy-tale vein.' *Financial Times*

### LULU METROPOLITAN OPERA

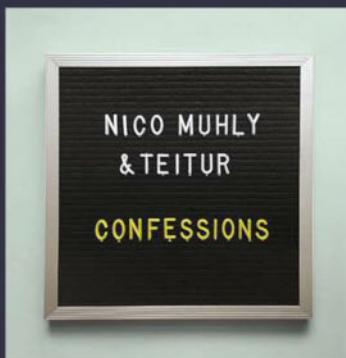
The Metropolitan Opera's critically acclaimed 2015 production of Alban Berg's monumental opera, directed by visual artist William Kentridge, and starring Marlis Petersen in her final performances as Lulu. Released on Blu-ray and DVD together in one package.



'A stunning and searing production.' *New York Times*

### NICO MUHLY & TEITUR CONFessions

A collaboration between the acclaimed American composer Nico Muhly and Faroese singer-songwriter Teitur, which began when Muhly was composer-in-residence at Muziekgebouw Eindhoven. Recorded with Holland Baroque.



'A quirky, charming mix of songs combining Teitur's winsome voice and Muhly's baroque string textures.' *The Atlantic*



nonesuch.com

# CHORAL & SONG

*Masaaki Suzuki* and his musicians have fun with Bach's peasant comedy; *Mhairi Lawson* is an exquisite Dafne in Handel's early dramatic cantata; *Edward Gardner* finds sweeping lyricism in Schoenberg's mighty *Gurre-Lieder*; and *Ian Bostridge* launches The Globe theatre's new label

## BBC MUSIC CHORAL & SONG CHOICE

### A great tour of the British Isles

Terry Blain enjoys Tenebrae's superb championship of neglected gems



#### MUSIC OF THE SPHERES

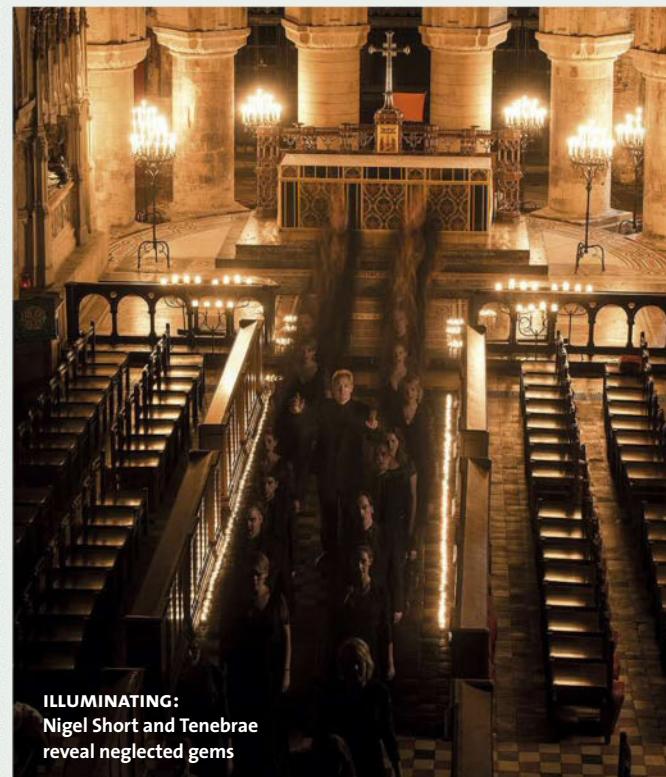
Part Songs of the British Isles: works by Murrill, Bridge, Vaughan Williams, Elgar, Walker, Bingham, Stanford, Harvey and Chilcott  
Tenebrae/Nigel Short  
*Bene Arte SIGCD 904 65:04 mins*

The British part song is, as conductor Nigel Short acknowledges in the booklet, still a relatively under-excavated area. It contains treasures in it, not least Herbert Murrill's two Shakespeare settings from *Twelfth Night*, a blithe, lilting 'O Mistress Mine' and a harmonically adventurous 'Come Away, Death'. Both are

#### In 'Full Fathom Five' the opening bell sequence is exquisitely weighted

sung with delicate sentience by Short's choir Tenebrae, the pulse and phrasing of the musical lines determined by a refined attention to words and meaning. The same is true of Vaughan Williams's *Three Shakespeare Songs*, where the performance of 'Full Fathom Five' is as fine as you will get, the opening 'ding-dong bell' sequence exquisitely weighted, the welling and lapping of the ocean waves graphically rendered in the aquatic echo-chamber Short conjures from his vocal forces.

A watery grave also features in Judith Bingham's remarkable



ILLUMINATING:  
Nigel Short and Tenebrae  
reveal neglected gems

*The Drowned Lovers*, where Martha McLorinan's haunted solo is underlaid by billowing, deep-lying ensemble textures, pinned to the thrumming basses. A spooky, flickering account of Elgar's *Owls* underlines the ability of Short and his outstandingly responsive singers to create riveting atmosphere, and communicate to the listener the import and implications of a song's narrative. There is extroversion, too, in *The Runner* and *One's-Self I Sing*, settings of Walt Whitman by Bob Chilcott, and in a witty,

brilliantly nimble interpretation of Frank Bridge's *The Bee*, to words by Tennyson.

Full texts and enlightening notes on the music are included, further enhancing the attractions of this intelligently assembled, superbly sung collection.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

 **ON THE WEBSITE**  
Hear extracts from this recording  
and the rest of this month's choices on  
the **BBC Music Magazine website**  
[www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)



#### JS BACH

Peasant Cantata, BWV 212;  
Non sa che sia dolore, BWV 209;  
Amore traditore, BWV 203  
Mojca Erdmann (soprano), Dominik Wörner (bass); Bach Collegium Japan/  
Masaaki Suzuki  
*BIS BIS-2191 (hybrid CD/SACD) 63:25 mins*

Bach's sacred style is so distinctive, his output so prolific, that he's much less familiar in secular guise. In this substantial 'Cantata burlesque', as the *Peasant Cantata* is subtitled, he's indebted to the public comic opera developed by Reinhard Keiser in Hamburg. The Overture is a series of six contrasting fragments; the text is in German, songs are mostly short, and constructed from brief repeated phrases, some folk-related. Comedy is topical, reviling the tax collector, praising the newly-succeeded Lord of the Manor. Elsewhere you will be hard-put not to join in the belly laugh of the young farmer enjoying free beer and flirting with a peasant girl, Mieke. Bagpipes take an age to wind up drones to the right pitch for the final chorus.

The two voices are ideally cast. Mieke (Mojca Erdmann) sings with a charming simplicity as she resists and then gives way to the advances of her rustic beau, Dominik Wörner. He sings with great character, a mischievous inner grin seeming to colour his tone and clarify his diction. Both are given one full-scale Italianate aria. Wörner has bold solo horn and continuo accompanying his rumbustious song 'in the town style' while Erdmann has flute *obbligato*, as clean and unsullied as her vocal line.

After Bach in shirt-sleeves, wig awry perhaps, and with a Stein of beer in hand, come two Italian secular cantatas, their authorship both questionable, as the notes helpfully explain. Bach set the arcane text of *Non sa che sia dolore*, again matching soprano and flute with strings. *Amore*

*traditore* is particularly puzzling – two arias in a style quite unlike most familiar Bach, for bass and highly virtuosic and largely independent harpsichord *obbligato*, played with stirring bravura. *George Pratt*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



## BERIO • MAHLER

**Mahler: 10 frühe Lieder (arr Berio); Berio: Sinfonia**

Matthias Goerne (baritone); Synergy Vocals; BBC Symphony Orchestra/Josep Pons

Harmonia Mundi HMC902180 61:29 mins

What a programme: Berio's orchestrations of Mahler's early songs sung by Matthias Goerne preface his Mahler-soaked Sinfonia. It's an illuminating frame in which to encounter the mercurial Modernist: there are moments in the Sinfonia's third movement – which splices, overlays and explodes the *Scherzo* from Mahler's Second Symphony with the contents of Berio's brain – when it sounds like a barbaric send-up. But we have only to listen to his exquisite song orchestrations, graced with Goerne on riveting, vibrant form, to feel the depth of his empathy, an almost palpable longing to be absorbed into that lost Viennese world. 'But now it's done, it's over, we've had our chance...', as the speaker observes – an unnamed actor/singer whose insouciant candour lends such character to this reading.

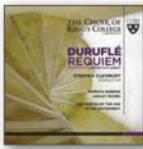
Berio intuitively harnessed the energies of Mahler's music so that Debussy's *La mer*, Strauss's *Rosenkavalier*, Ravel's *La valse* and Stockhausen's *Gruppen* (to name but four) emerge with absolute inevitability from Mahler's score, alongside virtuosic contributions from Synergy Vocals, and witty chatter – a prophetic vision of our saturated, overcrowded, individualised 21st-century listening world. It's an exhilarating *tour de force*, and Pons finds an almost effortless coherence in this dynamic, artfully-balanced recording with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. It may be at the expense of free-wheeling frenzy, but the nuanced, audible text (Lévi-Strauss, Beckett) achieves mordant hilarity – surely Berio's intention. The first and last sections are fantastically vivid, 'O King' luminous and deeply affecting. Recordings of the Sinfonia by Pierre Boulez and the Swingles, and Peter Eötvös and London Voices aren't

'CHARMING SIMPLICITY':  
Moja Erdmann plays  
Bach's peasant heroine



replaced, but this coupling is a must-have. *Helen Wallace*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



## DURUFLÉ

**Requiem; Messe Cum Jubilo; Quatre Motets sur des thèmes Grégoriens**

Patricia Bardon (mezzo-soprano), Ashley Riches (bass-baritone); Choir of King's College, Cambridge; Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment/Stephen Cleobury; Tom Etheridge, Richard Gowers (organ); *The Choir of King's College KGS 0016* (hybrid CD/SACD) 63:49 mins

First, editions: for both the Requiem and *Messe Cum Jubilo* Duruflé made three performing versions, with accompaniment for full orchestra and organ, chamber orchestra and organ, and organ alone. In the Messe, it's the organ-only option that's used here, for the Requiem, the chamber orchestra recension (see also p80). Despite the smaller orchestra, the textures still sound washy at the climax of the Kyrie in the Requiem, the sound swirling around in the capacious King's College acoustic. There's boldly resonant voicing from the altos at 'Christe eleison', and in the Introit the phrasing of the plainsong material is meticulously measured, with a pleasing fluidity.

The altos' shapely phrasing impresses again at the beginning of the Domine Jesu Christe, and while Stephen Cleobury brings the music satisfactorily to the boil as the punishments of hell are

contemplated, detail is again compromised by reverberation. Patricia Bardon's operatic take on the Pie Jesu is dramatic to the detriment of intimacy, but the In Paradisum was made for the King's College trebles, and they map the chaste contours of its opening paragraph fearlessly.

The unaccompanied *Quatre Motets* are neatly presented, if a touch glib and emotionally reticent. Probably the best performance here is of the *Messe Cum Jubilo* for baritones, where the singers' familiarity with plainchant is again telling. The organ threatens to occlude the choir as the Gloria launches, but there's plenty of fire and interpretive detail in the singing. The Requiem, by contrast, feels a little flat in places, and strangely unengaging. *Terry Blain*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



## GESUALDO

**Sacrae Cantiones, Book 1**  
The Marian Consort/Rory McCleery *Delphian DCD 34176* 60:55 mins

Stained with the blood of his first wife, whom he murdered in *flagrante delicto*, and tormented by accusations that his lover was a witch, Carlo Gesualdo spent his last years in search of absolution. His quest produced some of the most remarkable musical offerings of the period, including the brooding *Tenebrae Responsories* and two books of sacred motets, the *Sacrae Cantiones*

of 1603. There are surprisingly few recordings of the latter, though they are just as expressive and disquieting as his more famous works.

The Marian Consort here presents the first book: 19 motets for five voices setting starkly penitential texts. Highly-charged dissonances, strange harmonic progressions and harsh chromaticisms paint words that implore and plead and cry out for mercy. Though they are as dramatic as Gesualdo's madrigals, these sacred works inhabit a very different world, which the ensemble enhances with its ethereal sound. The voices float in a transparent acoustic and expressive gestures are generally subdued – aptly so for works intended for private devotion and penitence.

Rory McCleery laces these fleeting pieces into a cogent, deeply introspective, musical rosary, and if his unity of vision leads to a rather unvarying approach to tempo and timbre, this is a small caveat, for these are haunting accounts. *Kate Bolton-Porciatti*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## HANDEL

**Apollo e Dafne; Il Pastor fido – Overture; Aria in F, HWV 410 & 411**  
Mhairi Lawson (soprano), Callum Thorpe (bass); Ensemble Marsyas/Peter Whelan *Linn CKD543* 68:58 mins

Begin in Venice as the 25-year-old Handel prepared to depart Italy, the dramatic cantata *Apollo e Dafne* is an obvious choice for Ensemble Marsyas's first venture into vocal music. It oozes the sort of vibrant woodwind writing that is meat and drink to bassoonist Peter Whelan's crack band created in 2011 to champion virtuoso 18th-century wind music. Moreover, throw a stylishly turned account of the wind-engorged overture to *Il pastor fido* into the mix, plus the bonus of two little-known arias for fruitily pungent pairs of oboes, horns and a bassoon, and the voices are almost reduced to walk-on parts before singing a note.

By the clock longer than many an early Haydn or Mozart symphony, the six-movement Overture proves a fulsome upbeat, its scale threatening to engulf the cantata, but the segue is neatly done, allowing Callum Thorpe's Apollo to introduce himself with the virile heft of the all-conquering god he perceives himself to be. Eight arias and two duets later

## REISSUES

Reviewed by Malcolm Hayes

## BRAHMS • SCHUMANN

## Vocal Quartets

Petersen, Vondung, Doufexis, Gura, Jarnot; Berner, Radicke (piano)  
Harmonia Mundi HMG5084701  
(2007/10) 125 mins (2 discs)



State-of-the-art performances of much-loved repertoire, with superb individual singers also blending with ease, immaculate accompanying, and flawless recorded sound. No texts are included in the booklet.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

## ELGAR

*Caractacus; Severn Suite*  
Howarth, Davies, Wilson-Johnson, Roberts, Miles; London Symphony Chorus & Orchestra/Richard Hickox  
Chandos CHAN 241-58 (1993)  
119.51 mins (2 discs)



*Caractacus* has Victorian oratorio conformity rubbing shoulders with music of true Elgarian sensibility. Excellent singing and playing throughout.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

## FINZI

*Introit; For St Cecilia; Dies natalis; In terra pax; Magnificat, etc*  
Langridge (tenor); London Symphony Chorus & Orchestra; Richard Hickox Singers; City of London Sinfonia/Hickox; Exultate Singers/O'Brien Eloquence 482 2556 (1979/80)  
156.44 mins (2 discs)



A likeable Finzi starter pack, with *Dies natalis* shining through as a classic statement. The Hickox-directed performances are excellent; the O'Brien ones suffer from dodgy choral tuning.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

## RACHMANINOV

*Vespers*  
USSR Ministry of Culture Chamber Choir/Valeri Polyansky  
Alto ALC 1315 (1988) 66.32 mins



Nothing beats a Russian choir in this masterwork, and Polyansky's extreme-rubato approach has beautiful detail and flow. Clear and spacious sound, though it distorts at some full-volume moments.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

it will all end in tears as the object of his desire is turned into a laurel bush to evade his advances. The heroic bluster of ‘Spezza l’arco’ beautifully sets up Dafne’s oboe-gilded first number which is exquisitely shaped and coloured by Mhairi Lawson (no wonder Apollo is smitten); and, swapping his bassoon for the harpsichord, Peter Whelan directs with a stylistic verve that never once takes its eye off the dramatic ball. Just occasionally both singers sound a touch pushed, but laurel wreaths all round – especially to Ensemble Marsyas who all but steal the show.

Paul Riley

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



## SCHOENBERG

*Gurre-Lieder*

Alwyn Mellor (soprano), Anna Larsson (mezzo), Stuart Skelton, Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacke (tenor), James Cresswell (bass), Thomas Allen (speaker); Choir of Collegium Mūsicum; Edvard Grieg Kor; Orphei Drāngar; Students from the Royal Northern College of Music; Bergen Philharmonic Choir & Orchestra/Edward Gardner  
Chandos CHSA 5172 (hybrid CD/SACD) 102.58 mins (2 discs)

Considering the huge choral and orchestral forces it requires, Schoenberg’s gorgeous early Wagnerian song-cycle-cum-cantata *Gurre-Lieder* has achieved an impressive number of recordings. Most of them have comprised edited versions of live performances – though Marcus Stenz’s highly recommendable 2015 Cologne account on Hyperion was a four-day studio effort.

Yet, compiled from a series of live performances in the spacious acoustic of the Greighallen in Bergen last December, this latest recording from Chandos is quite as distinguished – and rather more successful in capturing the teeming detail of Schoenberg’s complex textures. Of the five solo roles, Stuart Skelton as King Waldemar thrillingly encompasses Schoenberg’s extravagant demands from the tenderest intimacy to the most heroic rhetoric. Alwyn Mellor is full-toned as his lover Tove, qualified only by an occasional tendency to lag behind the beat. There is an austere fine Wood Dove from Anna Larsson and an incisively sardonic Klaus the Fool from Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacke. As the Narrator in the ‘Summer Wind’ episode, Sir

Thomas Allen is balanced a little too far forward for Schoenberg’s exquisitely fine-spun textures, yet the densely written male voice choruses of Part Three come over with exceptional clarity, while the Bergen Philharmonic, with reinforcements from the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, plays vibrantly throughout.

The hero, nonetheless, is Edward Gardner, under whose wonderfully flexible bat this hyper-Romantic music positively breathes in long lyrical phrases and paragraphs. Nor are excitements lacking: the coda to the Klaus episode fizzes with crazy virtuosity and the final sunrise is as grandly summatory as any.

Bayan Northcott

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



## REMEMBRANCE

Durufle: Requiem; Farrant: Call to Remembrance; Tomkins: When David Heard; Trad: Kontakion of the Dead; Tavener: Song for Athene; Ramsey: How are the mighty fallen; Harris: Bring us, O Lord God; Monk: Abide with me (arr. Ross); Elgar: They are at rest; Weelkes: When David heard

Jennifer Johnston (mezzo), Neal Davies (bass), Guy Johnston (cello); Choir of Clare College, Cambridge/Graham Ross; Matthew Jorysz (organ)  
Harmonia Mundi HMU 907654 78.10 mins

This is a beautifully programmed and performed disc. While the ‘Remembrance’ of the title is nominally the central theme, what we have here is various reflections on death – both its occurrence and its aftermath – in works dating from Farrant and Tomkins in the Renaissance to John Tavener in the late 20th century, by way of the likes of Elgar, William Harris and Russian Orthodox chant. All are unaccompanied until Durufle’s Requiem, the final and most substantial work, at which point we are joined by Lincoln Cathedral’s mighty Father Willis organ (the rest of the disc is recorded in the gloriously resonant acoustic of Ely Cathedral).

Some conductors like to float celestially or linger prayerfully on Durufle’s Gregorian chant-inspired melodic lines. Graham Ross takes a more full-on approach, with tempos brisk and passions raised – mezzo Jennifer Johnston’s ‘Pie Jesu’ is, in particular, an emotional *tour de force*. Never, though, does Ross let

those passions run riot, and the choral ensemble and balance is immaculate throughout.

Of recordings of the choir and organ version of Durufle’s Requiem, I’ve heard none better. This, though, is just the crowning point of an engaging and thought-provoking recital, including a perfectly poised and paced Harris *Bring us, O Lord God* and conductor Graham Ross’s exquisite own arrangement of *Abide with me*. Jeremy Pound

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



## SONGS FROM OUR ANCESTORS

Songs by Dowland, Ruan Ji, Britten, Schubert, Xu Changjun, Argento, Chen Yi & Goss

Ian Bostridge (tenor), Xuefei Yang (guitar)  
Globe Music GM-001 70.17 mins

Recorded in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, the Jacobean auditorium at Shakespeare’s Globe on London’s Bankside, this is the first release on the theatre’s own label. There could scarcely be a more distinguished debut. These ‘ancestors’ speak through two millennia, from Ruan Ji’s *Drunken Ecstasy* (early third century AD) to 21st-century pieces by Xu Changjun, Chen Yi and Stephen Goss. The programme ranges from some of Dowland’s and Schubert’s greatest hits, such as *Flow My Tears* and *An Die Musik*, to more ‘exotic’ recent commissions setting, or inspired by, ancient Chinese poems. Despite the disparate origins and moods of the pieces the recital coheres extremely well, while still providing plenty of stimulating contrast.

Ian Bostridge’s clear tone and exemplary diction maintains a warm, intimate quality (he often seems to be button-holing us personally) and he could not ask for a more responsive partner: Xuefei Yang’s playing is sensitive, agile and graceful, both when functioning as accompanist and on the instrumental solos. Although using various guitars throughout, when appropriate she vividly evokes lute, mandolin and even the Chinese four-stringed *pipa* and the zither-like *guqin*, using a modified seven-string guitar to realise the Ming dynasty tune *Flowing Water*, probably dating from Shakespeare’s time. Barry Witherden

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



# ORA SUZI DIGBY

ALL STAR VOCAL ENSEMBLE ORA  
ON THE LEGACY OF SAVONAROLA



CD HMW 9066103

## Refuge From The Flames

Following the stunning success of their debut release 'Upheld by Stillness', Suzi Digby's all-star vocal ensemble ORA presents their new album: 'Refuge from the Flames'.

Dedicated to the legacy of Girolamo Savonarola, 15th century Dominican friar and religious reformer, this new release furthers ORA's aim to showcase classic masterpieces of Renaissance choral music alongside reflections from contemporary composers. The musicians of ORA bring with them a wealth of choral experience that we hope show these pieces, both new and old, as the stunning works of art that they truly are.

*'We begin and end this second ORA album with two contrasting settings of the Miserere mei (Psalm 50, Vulgate). Over the centuries this text has inspired reflections by many Christian writers, none more influential than those by Girolamo Savonarola, and we have devoted much of this album to his extraordinary legacy. Central to the recording is Savonarola's meditation on the psalm, Infelix Ego, written shortly before his execution. We present it here in William Byrd's justly famous setting, and in a newly commissioned masterpiece by the Latvian composer Ēriks Ešenvalds.'* - Suzi Digby OBE

[harmoniamundi.com](http://harmoniamundi.com)

# CHAMBER

A feast of Mendelssohn this month thanks to discs from both the *Escher* and *Sacconi Quartets*; cellist *Gautier Capuçon* and pianist *Frank Braley* turn to Beethoven's cello sonatas; plus the *Brodsky Quartet* revisit all of Shostakovich's string quartets in an impressive live cycle

## BBC MUSIC CHAMBER CHOICE

### Anguish with a light touch

Jessica Duchen enjoys the Escher Quartet's dazzling Mendelssohn



#### MENDELSSOHN

String Quartet No. 5 in E flat, Op. 44/3; String Quartet No. 6 in F minor, Op. 80; Four Pieces, Op. 81 – Capriccio and Fugue  
Escher String Quartet  
BIS BIS-2160 (hybrid CD/SACD) 71:17 mins

The Escher Quartet have reached the climax of their CD series of the Mendelssohn quartets, with a disc that hits the jackpot in every way. For a start, the programme works very well: the E flat major and F minor quartets make an excellent contrast and the two pieces from the diverse collection that comprise Op. 81

serve as palate cleanser while also revealing their own sterling quality.

The two big quartets represent opposite poles: the E flat major, dating from 1837–8, is a sunny, touching piece with a songlike slow movement. The Escher's leader, Adam Barnett-Hart, makes the

#### The Escher Quartet's playing is full of propulsive intensity

most of it by using some delicate portamentos that are entirely fitting. It's a bright and tender account, with balances finely judged, whether between the instruments or between the myriad emotions that flash through its fizzing duration.

Mendelssohn died of a stroke in November 1847 not long after

completing the F minor work. It's one of his most turbulent creations – and the likelihood that it reflects his grief over the death of his sister Fanny a few months earlier, among other things, means it would be easy for performers to make heavy weather of it. The Escher Quartet's playing is full of propulsive intensity that never stints on anguish, but they manage to keep their lightness of touch, letting the music make its points with swift, pure directness.

All in all, a wonderful disc, with splendid SACD sound quality.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

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#### JS BACH

Sonata for Keyboard and Violin No. 4, BWV 1017

#### BRAHMS

Scherzo in C minor from FAE Sonata

#### SCHUMANN

Violin Sonata No. 1; Fantasiestücke

Itzhak Perlman (violin),  
Martha Argerich (piano)  
Warner 9029593789 50:58 mins

Of the four works included here, Itzhak Perlman has only recorded the Brahms *Scherzo* before, while the Schumann First Violin Sonata is a long-anticipated live recording dating from July 1998, presented here for the first time on disc. There is clearly a strong musical rapport, yet these players cannot quite disguise their temperamental differences, with Perlman the *cantabile* magician exalting in Schumann's melodic genius and Martha Argerich restlessly probing – texturally, dynamically and temporally.

The rest of the recital was recorded in Paris's Salle Colonne earlier this year, in warmer, well-balanced sound. Argerich has played the Schumann *Fantasiestücke* countless times before, although rarely with such glowing warmth and affection, but the Bach and Brahms are entirely new to her – not that you'd know it from her majestic playing. Here they sound more of a convincing partnership, with Perlman generally more flexible and probing in terms of his tempos, dynamics and phrasing, and Argerich capturing the music's broad sweep with a greater sense of the long-range as well as the short-term. As a result, the Brahms sounds less full-on than in Perlman's previous account with Vladimir Ashkenazy (also Warner), and is inflected with a greater sense of emotional light and shade.

Yet the star item here is undoubtedly the Bach Sonata. Here both artists truly play as one, with

Perlman capturing a hushed intimacy in the slower movements that is deeply affecting. Argerich's Bach playing is sublime – majestic, tonally ravishingly and supremely focused. More please! Julian Haylock

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



## BEETHOVEN

**Cello Sonatas Nos 1-5; Variations – on 'Bei Männern', 'Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen' and 'See, the Conqu'ring Hero Comes'**  
Gautier Capuçon (cello),  
Frank Braley (piano)  
*Erato 9029595113 143:52 mins (2 discs)*

Gautier Capuçon and Frank Braley deliver well-honed interpretations of these masterworks, offering perfect unanimity of ensemble and admirable clarity of texture throughout. The duo is at its best in the three sets of Variations where they manage to encapsulate a wide range of contrasting moods and timbres to impressive effect. Yet my overall impression is that these performances are somewhat let down by the recording which gives a rather recessed perspective for the two instruments, and there are some moments where the balance seems to place either the cello or the piano too far forward in terms of the musical argument.

## BACKGROUND TO...

### Dmitri Shostakovich



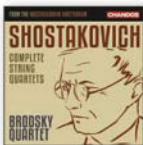
(1906-75)  
Shostakovich's first string quartet, written in 1938, hardly suggests the emotional depth of his subsequent

works in the form. His first attempt at a sequel, in 1940, resulted in his Piano Quintet: he said the piano part was so he could take part in its performance. Quartet No. 2, in 1944, immediately followed his Piano Trio No. 2 (dedicated to the memory of his friend Ivan Sollertinsky). So began a major cycle, of which his last quartet, No. 15, was completed a year before his death.

JEAN-BAPTISTE MILLOT, GETTY



**LEGENDS UNITED:**  
Martha Argerich joins  
Itzhak Perlman in Bach



## SHOSTAKOVICH

### String Quartets Nos 1-15

Brodsky Quartet  
*Chandos CHAN 10917(6)  
397:27 mins (6 discs)*

Few British ensembles have been more dedicated exponents of Shostakovich than the Brodsky Quartet. After their first recorded complete cycle for Teldec made in 1989, they have continued to give memorable concerts of his works in an astonishing variety of settings, from remote churches on Norwegian fjords to the Sydney Opera House.

As viola player Paul Cassidy explains in his engaging booklet notes, the Brodskys decided to make live recordings in the belief that concerts allow for a greater degree of communion between composer, performers and audience than the relatively clinical backdrop of the recording studio. This strategy works particularly well here since the performances as a whole achieve a rare degree of intensity. It really draws you into the unsettling subtext of Shostakovich's writing. Even if there are a few moments where the ensemble is not absolutely pristine, the Brodskys take greater risks than in their first recording, whether, for example, in stoking up ever-increasing levels of ferocity in the relentless second movement of the Tenth, or in adopting a much slower yet concentrated tempo for the outer movements of the Eighth.

Violinist Daniel Rowland's charismatic contribution comes into its own in the wonderfully sensitive way he moulds the anguished melodic lines in the Recitative of the Second. Notably, too, in the powerful way he dispatches the frenzied outbursts that punctuate the desolate landscape of the 15th.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of these recordings lies in the huge range of dynamics and timbres that are employed to project the sometimes bewildering sequence of emotions that emanate from Shostakovich's musical argument. Nowhere is this more compellingly conveyed than in the way the seemingly carefree exterior of the Sixth is repeatedly subverted to present the work in much darker colours than is often the case.

Erik Levi

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★

But even setting aside questions of the recorded sound, I find the playing, particularly in the two Op. 5 Sonatas, a little too bland, missing some of the obvious drama in the music. It's easy to forget that these were Beethoven's earliest duo works, and that he had every intention of dazzling audiences with the audacity of his ideas. Yet Capuçon and Braley opt for a more Classically restrained approach, underplaying the unexpected modulations in the F major Sonata's opening movement, and suppressing the sense of anguish and intensity in the slow introduction to the G minor. Although the Finale of the latter work is dispatched with energy and bravura, Capuçon and Braley make far too little of Beethoven's many passages of knockabout humour. In this respect, the recent release by Xavier Phillips and François-Frédéric Guy (Evidence Classics) offers a much more dynamic experience, both players responding to Beethoven's writing with imagination and tremendous musical intelligence.

Erik Levi

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



## BEETHOVEN

### String Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132

### MENDELSSOHN

### String Quartet No. 2 in A minor, Op. 13

Sacconi Quartet  
*Sacconi SACC105 79:00 mins*

Given the obvious stylistic links between these two A minor String

Quartets, both composed within a matter of years of each other in the 1820s, it seems surprising that so few ensembles have thought of coupling them. So the Sacconi Quartet should certainly be applauded for their imaginative programming in this beautifully engineered release. Moreover, hearing the works side by side makes it abundantly clear that even though the young Mendelssohn was absolutely enthralled by Beethoven's originality, his distinctive voice is present in every bar of his own work.

Indeed, of the two performances, it's the Mendelssohn, originally released on the Champs Hill label, that has the greater immediacy. What is particularly admirable here is the way the Sacconis avoid falling into the obvious trap of either sounding too cloying in the lyrical opening and closing passages of the work, or being unduly histrionic in the fiery recitative passages of the Finale. Their capacity to maintain a sense of restraint in music that can sometimes seem over-heated actually serves to strengthen the power of Mendelssohn's argument.

Conversely, for all their technical brilliance and flawless ensemble, I feel that the Sacconis' performance of the Beethoven lacks inner drive and passion, especially in the main *Allegro* of the first movement. The outer sections of the ensuing *Allegro ma non tanto* are also a little ponderous, whereas the open-air squeeze box sounds of the Trio are much more imaginatively projected. Overall I didn't find the Sacconi's playing as dramatically compelling as that of the Quartetto di Cremona on a recent Audite release. Erik Levi

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★

# INSTRUMENTAL

*Lucas Debargue* demonstrates why he made waves at the Tchaikovsky Competition; *Angela Hewitt* returns to Bach's *Goldberg Variations*; plus *Joseph Moog* offers ideally balanced Chopin

## BBC MUSIC INSTRUMENTAL CHOICE

### Heartfelt homages

Benjamin Grosvenor reveals a fine imagination, says *Rebecca Franks*



#### HOMAGES

Works by Bach-Busoni, Mendelssohn, Franck, Chopin, Liszt; (digital edition only: Ravel)  
Benjamin Grosvenor (piano)  
Decca 483 0255 74:43 mins

This third recital album from Benjamin Grosvenor is every bit as pianistically brilliant as its precedents, showing off his fluid virtuosity, musical sensitivity and fearless approach. *Homages* is the title but the 24-year-old pianist hasn't taken the theme too literally. In fact, this is as much a homage to his great pianist predecessors as a showcase of composers paying tribute to one another. Best not

#### Franck's *Prelude, Choral and Fugue* is ineffably beautiful

worry about semantics and simply revel in the imaginative programme.

The Busoni transcription of Bach's solo violin Chaconne in D minor opens the disc. Grosvenor doesn't evoke the soundworld of the original, instead this work emerges as a pianistic *tour de force*, even hinting at the organ in its resonant bass notes, chunky chords and liberal sustaining pedal.

Bach looms large, too, in the Franck and Mendelssohn that follow. Grosvenor's eloquent approach pays dividends in the more Bachian passages of Mendelssohn's



'FLUID VIRTUOSITY':  
Benjamin Grosvenor  
dazzles at the piano

E minor Prelude and Fugue, while he takes the F minor Fugue at a breathtaking pace. The minor-key mood culminates in Franck's *Prelude, Choral et Fugue*, its central Chorale played with ineffable beauty and religious reverence.

The mood changes from dark to light for the second half. Chopin's Barcarolle is dispatched with passion, while Liszt's *Venezia e Napoli*, from *Les années de pèlerinage*, features magical crystalline playing and delicately drawn colours and atmosphere.

All that is already quite a feast, but if you stream or download the digital version of the album, you'll get a bonus of Ravel's *Le tombeau de Couperin* in a characterful performance. It's all recorded in fairly resonant but good sound.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



#### ON THE WEBSITE

Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the BBC Music Magazine website  
[www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)



#### JS BACH

Toccata and Fugue in C minor

#### BEETHOVEN

Piano Sonata No. 7 in D, Op. 10/3

#### MEDTNER

Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 5

Lucas Debargue (piano)  
Sony 88985341762 70 mins

The deluge of pianistic Wunderkinder shows no sign of abating, and the latest is Lucas Debargue. He has the added attraction of being controversial: after being placed fourth in last year's Moscow Tchaikovsky competition, he was awarded a special prize – the biggest boost a career can have.

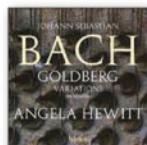
On this first studio recital he doesn't go in at all for showiness as he did in his live recital. He begins with a brief but wonderful Toccata and Fugue by Bach. He chooses the most dramatic of Beethoven's early piano sonatas before the *Pathétique*, with a slow movement which, on this occasion, struck me as an early attempt at writing what would eventually become the slow movement of the *Hammerklavier*. There is a sense in Op. 10 No. 3 that it is striving for something it can't realise, and Debargue takes it as far towards realisation as possible.

Debargue discovered Medtner's First Piano Sonata in a music shop at age 14, and it has haunted him ever since. It's not easy to see why. Medtner is mainly remembered for writing in a lush Rachmaninovian vein, but, harmonically, this 1903 piece sounds as if it could have been written half a century earlier; nor does it have striking melodies or a distinctive structure. If anything it sounds like an improvisation by someone fascinated by rapid broken octaves. At least this disc is out of the ordinary. Michael Tanner

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★



**PEERLESS CHOPIN:**  
Joseph Moog finds  
beauty and restraint



### JS BACH

#### Goldberg Variations

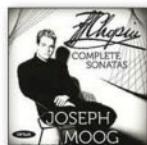
Angela Hewitt (piano)  
Hyperion CDA 68146 81:14 mins

Angela Hewitt and the *Goldbergs* go back a long way; she first performed them at the age of 16. The Canadian pianist describes the set as 'a constant companion', and memorably recorded the work back in 1999. As with *The Well-Tempered Clavier* she returns for another bite of the cherry, and in almost every respect bar one, her second thoughts – entrusted to her beloved Fazioli piano – leave the earlier version eclipsed. It's not that she's no longer in awe of the piece, but seems more relaxed and the freedom translates into something utterly organic.

Sixteen years on, the fingers are as formidably on the ball as ever – capable of the most tender translucency, of staccato leaps that 'ping', and able to differentiate and characterise several voices simultaneously with jaw-dropping felicity. The variations flow one into another with a newfound inevitability; and if she's still inclined to launch Variation 29 as if it were announcing the onset of the Apocalypse, the French Ouverture has lost its analytical awkwardness of yore. The caveat? Recorded in a Berlin church, there's a resonant bloom that enhances the limpidity of the aria and more songful variations, but tends to distract in busier moments. *Paul Riley*

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★★★  
★★★★★



### CHOPIN

#### Piano Sonatas

Joseph Moog (piano)  
Onyx ONYX 4152 77:10 mins

Joseph Moog earns respect even before playing a note on his new Chopin CD by including the seldom heard Sonata No. 1 in C minor. Surprisingly few discs offer all three of the composer's piano sonatas together, but then this early work (dating from his Warsaw student years of 1827–8) has always been something of an ugly duckling. It remained unpublished during Chopin's lifetime, and when in 2015 Warsaw's Chopin Competition finally admitted it to the prospectus, no one elected to play it. Though it will never be as well-loved as the Second and Third Sonatas, the First deserves to be much better known, and Moog is persuasive in showing why. The young German virtuoso – whose previous Onyx recordings include demanding works by Chopin's partly-Polish successors Moszkowski and Scharwenka – brings crisp brilliance to its outer movements and plays the unusual 5/4 *Larghetto* with freedom. In naturally recorded sound, he shows how radiant textures in the Minuetto and Trio surely anticipate the Minuet of Szymanowski's First Sonata, also reminding us of shared tonalities.

Moog makes one sit up and listen afresh to the opening of the Sonata in B flat minor, but the famous funeral march and wind-over-the-graveyard finale are not the most illuminating. By contrast, even in a

crowded discography, his Sonata in B minor stands out. One of Chopin's most profound masterpieces, it is a Romantic work built on Classical foundations, and though few pianists inhabit both aspects equally well, Moog conveys a sense of restraint while revelling in its beauty.

*John Allison*

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★★★  
★★★★★



### MOMPOU

*Fêtes lointaines*; *Charmes*;  
*Trois Variations*; *Cants Mágics*;  
*Suburbis*; *Pessebres*; *El Pastor*  
Steffen Schleiermacher (piano)  
MDG 613 1935-2 62:17 mins

Mompou used to dismiss the idea that he was a composer: 'I believe that I just am some kind of music, without knowing exactly if I created it'. His miniatures, which employ minimal resources for maximum effect, may be intellectually unassuming but they attract great pianists. In an essay for his Hyperion disc, Stephen Hough described this Catalan composer's oeuvre as 'the music of evaporation'. The supreme keyboard poet Arcadi Volodos, whose Mompou disc was nominated for a BBC Music Magazine Award, spoke of the music's 'luminous, nostalgic sound, and subtle and touching sadness'. Pianist Steffen Schleiermacher faces stiff competition.

He has chosen to focus on pieces composed between 1914 and 1921, after the composer's first return from Paris where he knew Satie and was friends with Milhaud and Poulenc; in these works one senses all that, and also distant echoes of Stravinsky. Schleiermacher brings to it a clean, honest pianism well suited to its tonal and formal simplicity. He brings out the Debussy-like soundworld of *Fêtes lointaines*, and conjures up the street scenes in *Suburbis*; he finds an appropriate mock-solemnity for *Trois variations*, and the naïve poetry of *Pessebres* is nicely caught.

But his approach is fundamentally pedestrian. What these pieces absolutely require, particularly when heard in bulk, is the magic touch of a player like Volodos, who calibrates his performances with infinite subtlety, and exquisitely simulates the bells among which Mompou grew up. *Michael Church*

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★★★  
★★★★★

## REISSUES

Reviewed by Jessica Duchen

### MARIA YUDINA:

#### Short Musical Portrait

Beethoven, Berg, Bartók & Stravinsky  
Maria Yudina (piano); USSR Radio  
Symphony Orchestra/Rozhestvensky  
Praga Digitals PRD 250 342 (1961–64)



This reveals an overwhelmingly powerful personality: Beethoven with ferocity, searing Berg, a whirlwind of Bartók and almost surreally brutal Stravinsky. Awful sound quality, but worth it.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

RECORDING

★★★

### BRAHMS

Hungarian Dances WoO1;  
Klavierstücke Op. 76; Waltzes Op. 39  
Cédric Tiberghien (piano)  
Harmonia Mundi HMA 1952015 (2008)  
71:14 mins

A pleasingly mixed selection of Brahms – two kinds of dances plus the dramatic Op. 76 – finds Tiberghien in lively mode, with plenty of elegance and warmth for the waltzes and supple accounts of the capriccios and intermezzos.

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★★★  
★★★★★

### SCHUBERT

Sonatas Nos 17, 20, 21; Impromptus  
D899, Nos 2 & 4 & D935 Nos 2 & 3 etc  
Artur Schnabel (piano),  
Karl Ulrich Schnabel (piano)  
Musical Concepts MC 3202 (1937–50)  
142:27 mins (2 discs)



Fluid, elegant, humane, noble, balanced, songful, unsentimental, eloquent: Schnabel's Schubert is everything these heavenly works should be, and more. Well-restored sound.

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★★★  
★★★★★

### BACH TRANSCRIPTIONS

Busoni, Liszt, Berners, Hess, Kempff,  
Le Fleming and Rachmaninov  
Gordon Ferguson-Thompson (piano)  
Australian Eloquence 482 4899  
(1991) 73:17 mins



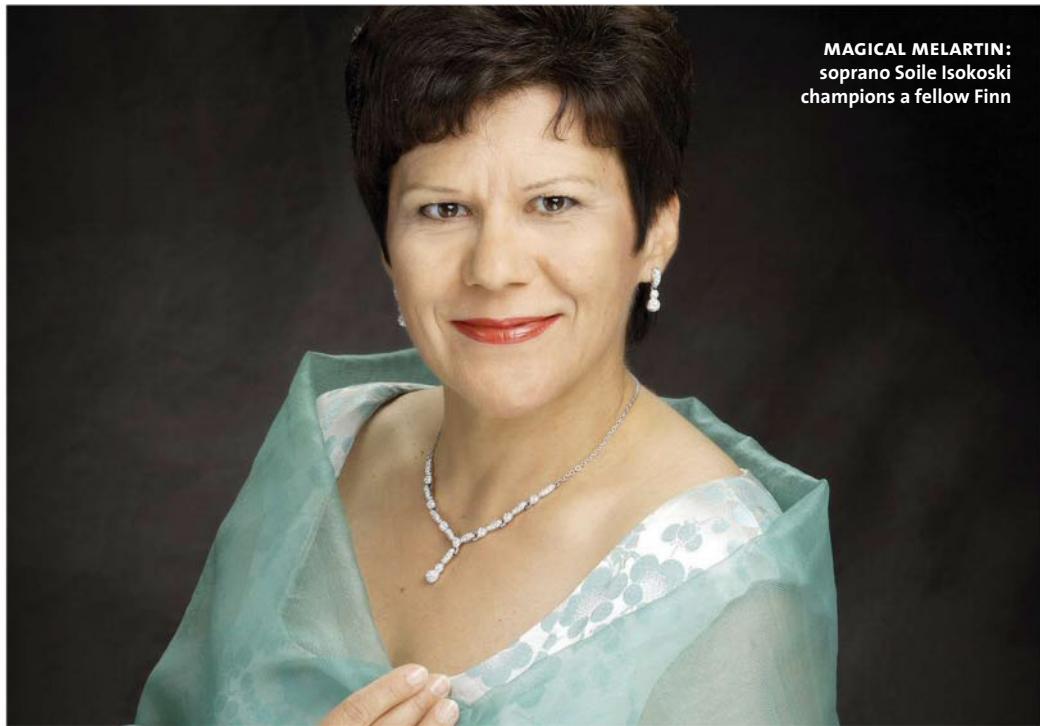
Full-blooded performances of these technicolour transcriptions, feasting upon their high-Romantic, no-holds-barred virtuosity, but never lacking in tenderness and reflectiveness.

PERFORMANCE  
RECORDING

★★★★★  
★★★★★

# BRIEF NOTES

Your quick listening guide to more new releases, including a feast of Russian music, Irish piano concertos and Brahms at his impassioned best



MAGICAL MELARTIN:  
soprano Soile Isokoski  
champions a fellow Finn

## Brahms • Franck • Debussy Cello sonatas

Victor Julien-Laferrière (cello),  
Adam Laloum (piano)  
*Mirare* MIR 310



Julien-Laferrière's burnished tone and Laloum's strident articulation combine for impassioned Brahms and Franck cello sonatas, their Debussy beautifully paced, poised and balanced. This duo has an innate sense of ensemble. (OC) ★★★★

## Brahms Liebeslieder Waltzes, Opp. 52 & 65; Waltzes, Op. 39

McLaren (soprano), Losier (mezzo),

Charbonneau (tenor), Sylvestre (bass-baritone); Myriam Farid and

Olivier Godin (piano)

*ATMA Classique* ACD2 2710

Brahms's two sets of *Liebeslieder Waltzes* are the ultimate pick-me-up music, and there's plenty of joy in these accounts. The performance of the Op. 39 Waltzes for piano four hands could have more finesse. (RF) ★★★★



## Brahms String quintets

Mandelring Quartet,  
Roland Glassl (viola)  
*Audite* 97.724 54:55



The Mandelring Quartet, with viola player Roland Glassl, is a true team of equals. Its luscious, even sound is perfect for Brahms's rich quintets and shown to great advantage in this impeccably crisp recording. (EC) ★★★★

## Bruch

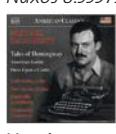
Violin Concerto No. 3;  
Romanze; Konzertstück  
Antje Weithaas (violin);  
NDR Radiophilharmonie/  
Hermann Bäumer  
*CPO* 777 8472



A welcome outing for Bruch's Third Violin Concerto which, compared to the omni-present First, rarely gets a look in. It's cut from the same luxurious late-Romantic cloth and gets an aptly sumptuous performance from Antje Weithaas. (JP) ★★★★

## Daugherty Tales of Hemingway; American Gothic; Once Upon a Castle

Zuill Bailey (cello), Paul Jacobs (organ); Nashville Symphony/  
Giancarlo Guerrero  
*Naxos* 8.559798



Colourful and characterful works inspired by 20th-century American culture, from Hemingway to Hearst Castle. Vivid performances, particularly by the excellent soloists. (RF) ★★★★

## Field Piano Concerto No. 3

Hammond Piano Concerto  
Michael McHale (piano); RTE National SO/Courtney Lewis  
*RTE Lyric FM* CD150



Two Irish piano concertos, composed 200 years apart. The Field (1811) consists of two movements of genial bonhomie either side of a beguiling nocturne. In contrast, Philip Hammond (2014) trundles laboriously from one nondescript idea to the next. (JP) ★★★

## Jenkins Cantata Memoria

Bryn Terfel, Elin Manahan Thomas et al; Sinfonia Cymru/Karl Jenkins  
*Deutsche Grammophon* 479 6486

Drawing on Welsh song and children's voices, Jenkins has made a decent job of marking the 50th anniversary of the Aberfan disaster. It's straightforward stuff, but all the more poignant for that. (JP) ★★★

## Kats-Chernin Solo and duo piano works

Cislowska, Kats-Chernin (piano)

*ABC Classics* 481 2625

Tamara-Anna Cislowska performs this showcase of Elena Kats-Chernin's piano works with sleek virtuosity. You may recognise the *Eliza Aria* from the 2007 Lloyds TSB advertisement. (EC) ★★★

## Melartin Traumgesicht; Marjatta; Music from The Blue Pearl

Isokoski (soprano);  
Finnish Radio SO/Hannu Lintu  
*Ondine* ODE 1283-2



Melartin's lushly atmospheric orchestral soundworld is more akin to the likes of Richard Strauss than his Finnish compatriot, Sibelius. Soile Isokoski is simply glorious in the tone poem *Marjatta*. (JP) ★★★★

## Rachmaninov Vespers

LSO Chorus/Simon Halsey *LSO Sing* LSO0781

Halsey's control of this 107-strong choir is impressive, dynamic contrasts expansive and impactful.

Inevitably, lines are a little on the fuzzy side, but every syllable is audible. (OC) ★★★

## Rachmaninov Vespers

Saint Thomas Choir of Men and Boys, Fifth Avenue, New York/John Scott Resonus RES10169



A fine tribute to John Scott – this is accomplished singing, the boys' voices forthright, the men ever sensitive to blend. Exemplary tuning. It pips the LSO Chorus for clarity and shape. (OC) ★★★★

## Shostakovich Piano Trios

Nos 1 & 2; Viola Sonata

Ashkenazy (piano), Visontay (violin), Lidström (cello), Meinich (viola)

*Decca* 478 9382

Wonderful recordings of works that span Shostakovich's life. Ashkenazy and co perform with the required combination of anguish, anger and playfulness. (OC) ★★★★

**Tchaikovsky** Piano Concerto No. 1; Nutcracker Suite Dariescu (piano); RPO/Darrell Ang Signum SIGCD441

The RPO and Dariescu make one majestic unit in Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto, but the Pletnev arrangement of the *Nutcracker* Suite for piano lacks the magic of the original. (EC) ★★★

**Tchaikovsky** Symphony No. 6; Romeo and Juliet Czech Philharmonic/Semyon Bychkov Decca 483 0656

A legendary orchestra with an intelligent and well-respected conductor – but these are disappointingly prosaic readings lacking in atmosphere and dramatic engagement. (DJ) ★★★

**Vaughn Williams** Tallis Fantasia; Britten Frank Bridge Variations; Elgar Introduction and Allegro LSO String Ensemble/Roman Simovic LSO LS00792 53:59 mins

Three of the best British string orchestra works, meticulously performed. I've heard more atmospheric Vaughan Williams and more idiomatic Elgar, but their Britten is spot on. (RF) ★★★★

**Vasks** String Quartets Nos 1, 2 & 4 Spikeru String Quartet Wergo 7330 2

The First String Quartet is the gem here – written in 1977, it reflects on the misery of Soviet existence with a mix of elegiac bleakness and raging fury. All three works get spirited performances. (JP) ★★★★

**Wagner** An Orchestral Adventure Baltic Sea Philharmonic/Kristjan Järvi Sony Classical 88985360682

A triumphant performance of De Vlieger's sweeping arrangement of Wagner's *Ring* cycle.

An ideal introduction to Wagner for anyone daunted by the scale of his operas. (EC) ★★★★

**All you need is Bach**  
Organ works by JS Bach Cameron Carpenter (organ) Sony 88875178262

More Stokowski than Bach. Carpenter is an imaginative player, but unnecessary ornamentation and constant manual/registration changes are too distracting. (OC) ★★

**Après un rêve** Works by Fauré, Debussy & Ravel Svarfvar (violin), Pöntinen (piano) BIS BIS-2183

Yet another disc taking its title from Fauré's song, but the playing is anything but routine. Intoxicating atmosphere, delicious rubato and lovely recorded sound. (RF) ★★★★

**Danse Macabre** Orchestral works Montreal SO/Kent Nagano Decca 483 0396

Nagano sets the volume dial to '11' in unashamedly big and brash performances of orchestral works inspired by all things supernatural. Ives's *Halloween* is a fun, if brief, surprise. (JP) ★★★★

**Polish Violin Concertos** Bacewicz, Tansman, Spisak and Panufnik Piotr Plawner (violin); Kammersymphonie Berlin/Bruns Naxos 8.573496

Four lively Polish violin concertos from 1930–1971, well performed. Buy it for the colourful, lyrical, smart Bacewicz, and then explore expansive Panufnik, neo-classical Spisak and neo-Baroque Tansman. (RF) ★★★★

**Sonnets** Song recital B Johnson (tenor), G Johnson (piano) Champs Hill Records CHRCD103

This eloquent poetry-led programme shows off Ben Johnson's powerful yet flexible voice and Graham Johnson's nuanced pianism. Their Liszt *Tre Sonetti di Petrarca* is a particular highlight. (EC) ★★★★

**Tailwind** Works by McDowell, Salter, Wilson and Yeats Gelächter Trio Oboe Classics CC2032

One couldn't ask for better performances of these contemporary woodwind works. All are full of inventive spirit, from a *Suite of Sweets* to the knottier *Dark Gravity*. (RF) ★★★★

**Treblesome** Britten, Bennett, Brahms, Schubert, Thomas et al The Temple Church Boys' Choir/Roger Sayer Orchid Classics ORC100058

The trebles of London's Temple Church sing this imaginatively mixed programme with verve and energy. Rodney Bennett's *The Insect World* is a charming vehicle for their sweet tone. (OC) ★★★  
Reviewers: Oliver Condy (OC), Elinor Cooper (EC), Rebecca Franks (RF), Daniel Jaffé (DJ), Jeremy Pound (JP)

## The month in box-sets



RISING STAR:  
pianist Lukas Geniušas  
plays Rachmaninov

## Giants of the keyboard

Our reissue round-up explores all things piano

Pianist Martha Argerich is notoriously private, willing to give few interviews. So the film *Bloody Daughter*, a personal portrait made by her daughter Stéphanie, a filmmaker, is especially welcome. It's the illuminating first DVD in the EuroArts *Argerich* set uniting two documentaries and several concerts, released to mark the

great musician's 75th birthday (2063798; 7 DVDs).

There's more

Martha this month – 20 CDs' worth more, in fact, in *Martha Argerich: the Warner Classics Recordings* (9029594898).

Bringing together recordings from the EMI, Teldec and Erato catalogues, the set opens with her 1965 recording of Chopin's Third Sonata. Three discs showcase recitals and concertos from the Concertgebouw in the late 1970s, and she joins forces with pianist Alexandre Rabinovitch for Messiaen, Mozart, Brahms and Rachmaninov. Plus there's Schumann, Bartók and more.

Pianist Sviatoslav Richter has also been given the complete Warner treatment, with a collection encompassing his recordings for HMV and Teldec in *Sviatoslav Richter: the Warner Classics Recordings* (9029593016; 24 CDs). The set replicates EMI's earlier *Icons* Richter set,

EuroArts marks  
Martha Argerich's  
75th birthday

and includes his Dvořák Piano Concerto with Carlos Kleiber and, with pianist Andrei Gavrilov, the Handel Keyboard Suites.

Richter's Rachmaninov isn't featured, but Piano Classics has released the Russian composer's **complete piano music** – which should help fill the gap. (6 CDs; PCLM011). Seven pianists feature,

including Nikolai Lugansky and rising star Lukas Geniušas.

And if our

Recording of the Month (p76) has whetted your appetite, then Murray Perahia plays Bach: The Complete Recordings (Sony Classical 88985344452; 8 CDs) might be for you. Perahia's former label has repackaged eight albums from 1997 to 2009, encompassing the English Suites, Partitas and Goldberg Variations.

MARTHA ARGERICH  
THE WARNER CLASSICS RECORDINGS



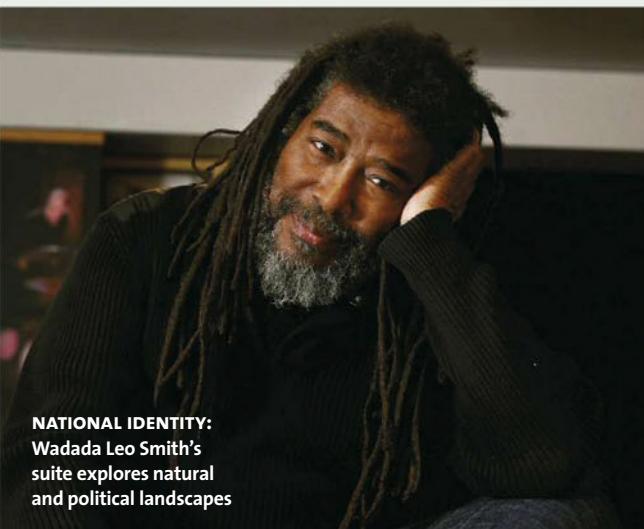
# JAZZ

Saxophonist *Tom Harrison* salutes Duke Ellington; funky brass from *The Big Shake-Up*; plus singer *Macy Gray* returns to her jazz roots

## BBC MUSIC JAZZ CHOICE

### Scenic splendour

*Roger Thomas* enjoys Wadada Leo Smith's epic jazz suite, inspired by US National Parks



NATIONAL IDENTITY:  
Wadada Leo Smith's  
suite explores natural  
and political landscapes



#### WADADA LEO SMITH

**America's National Parks**  
Golden Quintet: Wadada Leo Smith (trumpet), Anthony Davis (piano) et al  
*Cuneiform Records Rune 430/431*  
98 mins (2 discs)

If anything defines Wadada Leo Smith, it's his ability to marshall big ideas while also addressing the finest of detail, so a project such as this suite, with its title theme of *America's National Parks*, suits him well. It may seem an unlikely subject to the average European, but Smith neatly knits some universal sociopolitical

concepts into the work, such as the importance of common ownership and its attendant freedoms.

He also applies some elegant lateral thinking to the idea of preserving and respecting shared legacies by incorporating hommages to New Orleans and to the musicologist Eileen Southern, whose book *The Music of Black Americans: A History* is essential reading. The music constantly escapes its possible definition as a highly refined form of chamber jazz and is, as befits its inspiration, expansive and unhurried. Uncompromising in its modernity but with its own natural flow, this empathetically recorded set rewards similarly reflective listening. *Roger Thomas*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

Hear an excerpt of this recording at [www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)



#### THE BIG SHAKE-UP

**The Big Shake-Up**  
Jon Stokes (trombone), Jean-Paul Gervasoni, Paul Munday, Gavin Broom (trumpet), Sam Bullard (sax) et al, plus Sharleen Linton (vocals)  
*Big Shake-Up* 33 mins

Brass bands seem to be back in vogue: this album from the band formerly known as Bad Ass Brass follows an equally enjoyable release by the Hackney Colliery Band (HCB). As with the HCB, there are echoes of distinguished forerunners like the Dirty Dozen and Lester Bowie's Brass Fantasy, but The Big Shake-Up also has its own personality. At 33 minutes, the album is brief and to the point. It opens with 'Don't Block the Box', immediately setting out the stall with a funky strut, beefy sousaphone underpinning the interweaving lines of the reeds and higher-register brass.

The title track is intricate, with nimble playing all round and a tasty tenor solo. The band provides a silky backdrop to singer Sharleen Linton's slightly showy reading of 'God Bless the Child'. The lithe, relaxed, skilfully scored 'On the Move', builds slowly. The closing 'Bhangra and Mash' nicely mixes sinuous solos with plump ensembles. *Barry Witherden*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

associated with Duke Ellington being covered by a small group plus singer. Actually, it often has more in common with *Money Jungle*, Ellington's spiky, controversial collaboration with Max Roach and Charles Mingus.

The freedom of individual expression and the rowdy, after hours jamming atmosphere put the music out of the mainstream bracket – and joyfully so. Singer Cleveland Watkiss is in his element, channelling everyone from suave big band frontman Joe Williams to vocalese prankster Slim Gaillard. Drummer Lyttle and bassist Casimir take a tight loose approach while pianist Mitchell provides polite comping interspersed with torrential solo downpours.

Leader Tom Harrison's confidently uninhibited wailing on alto reflects his three years engrossed in and performing Ellingtonia. His tender solo take on 'Warm Valley' brings closure to a stormy, no holds barred live set. *Garry Booth*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★

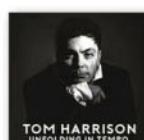


#### MACY GRAY

**Stripped**  
Macy Gray (vocals), Ari Hoenig (drums), Daryl Johns (bass), Russell Malone (guitar), Wallace Roney (trumpet)  
*Chesky JD389* 52 mins

Macy Gray may be best known as a soul diva but her distinctive voice also fits perfectly in a jazz context. Her new disc, *Stripped*, does exactly what it says on the tin, casting aside the multi-layered pop production of previous projects and allowing Gray's voice all the space it deserves. The small quartet is highly apt, with Roney's soaring trumpet complementing the star perfectly. There are plenty of standout tracks in this selection, mainly penned by Gray. The catchy 'Sweet Baby' has a rhythmically syncopated groove that is locked down by the bass and guitar, while 'Lucy', a track that was made up at the session, highlights the band's spontaneity and wit. Gray is, in fact, turning the clock back to when she sang jazz in her pre-stardom career. In the beautifully pared down version of her 1999 hit 'I Try' she effortlessly packs emotional power into every word. The recording quality is impeccable, which is all the more remarkable considering it was laid down in just 48 hours with one microphone. *Neil McKim*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



#### TOM HARRISON

**Unfolding in Tempo**  
Tom Harrison (sax), Cleveland Watkiss (vocals), Robert Mitchell (piano), Daniel Casimir (bass), David Lyttle (drums)  
*Lyte Records LRO38* 74 mins

Records like this don't come along too often. On face value, it's a selection of classic and obscure compositions

## JAZZ STARTER COLLECTION



**BACK IN THE DAY:**  
Sonny Rollins pushes boundaries in the 1950s

## No. 200 Sonny Rollins III

**Geoffrey Smith**, presenter of *Geoffrey Smith's Jazz*, on one of the greatest surviving jazz saxophonists



The 200th *Jazz Starter* column, and at Christmas too! The occasion demands something special,

and to me that still means Sonny Rollins. Routinely hailed as the greatest living saxophonist/jazz musician/improviser, Rollins is our link with the giants of the golden age. From his earliest days, he was accepted as one of the immortal company blazing a trail to the future. Miles Davis observed that some contemporaries even thought of him as on the same plane as bebop legend Charlie Parker. In Davis's words, 'I knew one thing: he was close'.

Now sadly prevented from performing by ill health, Rollins still casts his unique spell on disc. His first *Jazz Starter* (Oct 2001) was about *Saxophone Colossus*, the classic 1956 album he still regards as one of his best. In May 2006, his *Jazz Starter II* featured *Without a Song: The 9/11 Concert*, Rollins's majestic, life-affirming response to those terrible events, given just a few days after they occurred. And it also epitomises the tenorist's preference, in his later years, for live performance over studio work.

But some of his most intriguing playing came in the late 1950s,

a period of exploration and transition which culminated in his famous two-year sabbatical, when he withdrew from performance to practise and study, before returning to fresh acclaim in 1961. The four-CD Properbox compilation *Sonny Rollins: The Contemporary Leader* traces his quest through a fascinating series of encounters, from the trio with Oscar Pettiford and Max Roach which produced Rollins's politically pointed 'Freedom Suite', to a big band, to sessions with West Coast luminaries and the Modern Jazz Quartet, to Rollins on the road, stretching out in Europe.

Throughout, he's on top form, a paragon of swinging power and invention, hurtling through tempos at jaw-dropping speeds, conjuring ballad meditations at once tender and sardonic, turning improvised shapes into discovered compositions. And the set ends with the tenorist's post-retreat album *The Bridge*, displaying a new serenity as well as the creative fire that marks all his work.

## CD CHOICE



*Sonny Rollins – The Contemporary Leader*  
Properbox 186

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## NOVEMBER 2016

Join us for an in-depth exploration of American classical music; plus Steve Reich's *The Desert Music* on the cover CD.

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We celebrate the genius of JS Bach in ten of his greatest works; plus a CD of the Baroque master's *The Art of Fugue*.



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# BOOKS

Fiona Maddocks presents an enticing way of discovering or rediscovering one of life's joys (need we spell out what that is?); plus, a perfect seasonal gift for those who love King's College's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols



**CAROLS FROM KING'S:**  
*The Stories of our Favourite Carols from King's College*

**Alexandra Coghlan**  
BBC Books ISBN 978-1-78594-094-1  
208pp (hb) £9.99 rrp

The title of this book is a misnomer, but in a good way, for what the reader gets here is considerably more than a skim over the potted histories of 'favourite carols' sung annually at the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College, Cambridge.

There is, for one thing, a fair amount of material on how Christmas itself developed.

Alexandra Coghlan traces its origins to the pre-Christian Roman festival of Saturnalia, and the solstice festival of Yule in Scandinavia. Saturnalia in particular could be a wild occasion, with cross-dressing, partying and social insubordination run riot. Sound familiar?

Some of these pagan influences affected the development of Christmas in England, where boisterous, occasionally obstreperous 'wassailers' traipsed from door to door with a bowl of spiced ale or cider, inviting householders to drink and offer food in recompense to the singers. The songs they sang are among the earliest carols, and some survive to the present.

Coghlan sprinkles plenty of interesting information about the individual carols featured in her text, and is refreshingly irreverent in places. Had you ever imagined, for instance, that the 'prickle' of *The Holly and the Ivy* might have phallic implications? Or that *Deck the Halls* originated in a Welsh folk song extolling the softness of a lover's bosom?

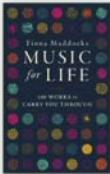
The section on the Nine Lessons service itself is quite extensive, and though Coghlan occasionally skirts hagiography, she can be sharp too, conceding that some listeners find the sound of the King's Choir 'too precious', and repeating David Willcocks's anecdotal comment about the chapel's famously rich acoustic: 'It could turn a fart into a sevenfold amen'.

Although the inclusion of a highlights CD would have helped, this is a lively, informative survey, and an ideal gift for those enamoured of the King's College Christmas experience. *Terry Blain* ★★★★

## BBC MUSIC BOOKS CHOICE

### An ode to joy

Here's a timely reminder of the importance of music, says *Anna Picard*



**MUSIC FOR LIFE:**  
*100 Works to Carry You Through*

**Fiona Maddocks**

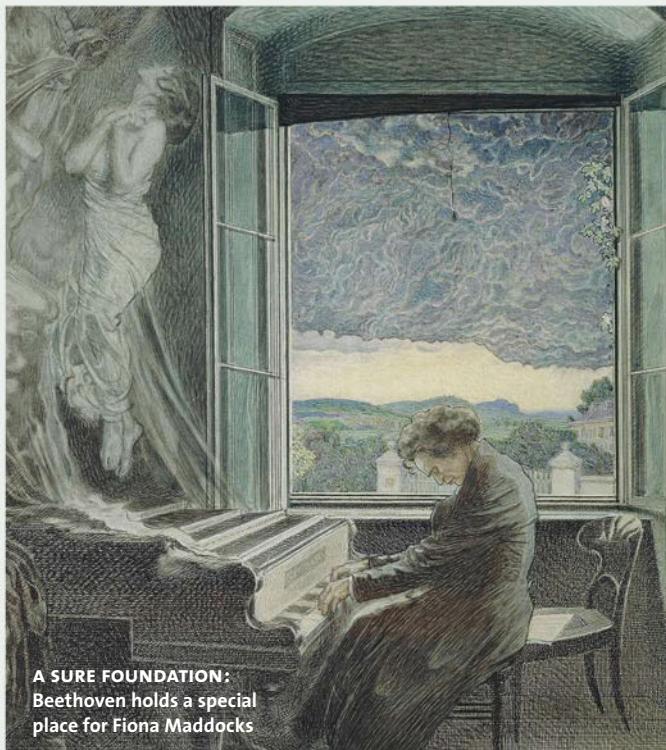
Faber ISBN 978-0-571-32938-0  
212pp (hb) £12.99 rrp

'You might say my brother and I owe our lives to Beethoven', writes Fiona Maddocks. Beethoven's 'compact, sunny' Eighth Symphony brought the writer's parents together when her father whistled its opening (incorrectly) at work and was answered by a hum from her mother. A half-remembered phrase helped a young couple fall in love and became 'a theme tune' to their daughter's childhood. An early lesson in the

#### Fiona Maddocks's descriptions are dangerously moreish

particular joy that is the subject of *Music for Life*.

That joy is something to hold on to in difficult times. Hence the subtitle of this book – 100 works to carry you through – and its deft zig-zag from merriment to desolation, love to loss. Beethoven's Eighth nestles between Mozart's *Gran Partita* and Schubert's *Trout Quintet* in an all-star chapter called 'Alive, Overflowing'. Elsewhere, works by Claude Vivier, Perotin, Machaut, Lili Boulanger, Fred Rzewski, George Crumb and Florence Price stand tall



**A SURE FOUNDATION:**  
Beethoven holds a special place for Fiona Maddocks

alongside music by Lassus, Mahler and Schumann.

Maddocks has a quiet, decisive voice, a predilection for tart asides, and a crisp style. All music writing is a slippery tussle between objective assessment, subjective responses and subconscious associations. Personal anecdotes are minimal: glimpses of the laundry basket; chamber music played with pleasure but not well. Her focus is more often on the sound and character of the music, and the men and women who composed it.

Delivered in morsels no bigger than this review, Maddocks's descriptions are dangerously

moreish. Vivaldi's violin figures 'fly up and down like clothes tossed on a washing line'. Janáček 'hurtles'. Beethoven 'boils'. Franck's A major Sonata for Violin and Piano is 'amiable, big-hearted, dreamy and vehement'. The recorders in Bach's *Actus Tragicus* 'twist and wrap around each other in mutual sorrow... the achievement complex and precisely balanced.' The agenda is not pedagogical. But listen to a selected work, take a trip down one of the branch-lines at the end of each chapter (many more than 100 works are mentioned), and you will learn all the same. ★★★★

# AUDIO GIFT GUIDE

Stuck for hi-fi gift ideas? *BBC Music Magazine's* resident audio expert *Michael Brook* is here to help with his selection of the very best kit for your Christmas wish-list



**SOUND INVESTMENTS:**  
(clockwise from above) Teenage  
Engineering's OD-11 wireless  
speaker; Grado iGe earphones;  
Pure's budget digital radio, the Elan 3;  
Audio Technica's AT-LP5 turntable

## DAB DIGITAL RADIO

**Pure Elan 3**  
**£49.99**

Lovers of DAB digital radio who are also on a budget will be pleased to hear that Pure's Elan 3 is fantastic value for money, packing in a clock, kitchen timer and six EQ (frequency equalisation) settings alongside a fine radio. Accessing DAB/DAB+ digital stations and FM is very easy with up to 40 presets available for quick recall. Available in three colours – red, blue and grey – the Elan 3 can also go portable with the addition of AA batteries. This value-for-money radio also sports an attractive 2.8" colour control screen. [argos.co.uk](http://argos.co.uk)

## EARPHONES

**Grado iGe**  
**£99**

Grado's on-ear headphones are renowned in hi-fi circles for their retro-inspired looks and stunning sound reproduction. Hewn from plain black plastic, the company's in-ear iGes are a relatively newer line. And while they don't have that Grado retro look, they do perform exceptionally well. Making ideal gifts for those who like listening to music through their smartphones and tablets, nothing will prepare you for the iGes' full-bodied, dynamic sound, rivalling anything at this price point – and much beyond. [grado.co.uk](http://grado.co.uk)

## TURNTABLE

**Audio Technica AT-LP5**  
**£329**

Vinyl records and record players are back in the public eye and will no doubt be featuring high on many Christmas lists this year. Audio Technica's LP5 turntable would make a great gift, as it crams a lot of features for the money. Its robust build and direct drive are worth shelling out for alone. It's easy to set up – you can plug it straight into your amp and start spinning – and it includes a handy USB output to create digital files from your record. Sonically, nothing else comes close at this price. [audio-technica.com](http://audio-technica.com)

## WIRELESS SPEAKER

**Teenage Engineering OD-11**  
**£499**

A faithful copy of the original OD-11 speaker created by audio legend Stig Carlsson in 1974, right down to the woven wire steel grilles, Teenage Engineering's AirPlay mini miracle can be used by itself, or in multiples to create a multi-room audio network. It also works well in stereo, paired up with another OD-11. Sonically, it's bright and delivers plenty of low-end punch. You wouldn't normally expect this level of bass from a system that doesn't have a subwoofer hidden somewhere else in the room. [teenageengineering.com](http://teenageengineering.com)

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# RADIO & TV

## THE 12 BEST CHRISTMAS PROGRAMMES

This issue we pick the classical music highlights of the festive season. Full listings return next month

For weekly broadcast highlights visit [www.classical-music.com](http://www.classical-music.com)



PIMLICO POLYPHONY:  
the Rodolfus Choir share  
Christmas tidings (Choice 11)

### 1 LANGSTON HUGHES

A special Radio 3 *Sunday Feature* explores the work of Langston Hughes, one of the key black US literary figures of the 20th century. His poetic works draw on the rhythms of jazz and, alongside his stories, give an alternative viewpoint of Christmas themes.

Radio 3; *Sunday Feature*; 4 Dec; 6.45pm

### 2 ANIMAL SYMPHONY

This may be one for your cat or dog, as Sky Arts looks at the effect that music has on animals. A specially composed work is being performed by the CBSO to an audience consisting of... all creatures great and small.

Sky Arts 2; 6 Dec; 9pm

### 3 A CEREMONY OF CAROLS

In the Barbican's Milton Court, a three-fold choral celebration is taking place, with festive works by Britten – including *A Ceremony of Carols* with harpist Tanya Houghton – and more recent festive fare

by Bob Chilcott and John Rutter. Chilcott conducts a premiere with the BBC Singers.

Radio 3; *In Concert*; 13 Dec; 7.30pm

### 4 PROKOFIEV WEEK

One of the most evocative winter pieces is the bell-filled 'Sleigh Ride' from Prokofiev's *Lieutenant Kijé* suite. It's therefore fitting that he gets a *Composer of the Week* slot this month. Prokofiev saw his role as an uplifting one, to 'help the people live a better, finer life.'

Radio 3; *Composer of the Week*; 19-23 Dec; 7.30pm

### 5 TCHAIKOVSKY'S THE NUTCRACKER

Tchaikovsky's enchanting 1892 ballet about the wooden Christmas gift that transforms into a prince also helped to raise the profile of the celesta. The BBC Philharmonic brings plenty of seasonal magic to Hanley's Victoria Hall with the ballet's highlights. Juanjo Mena conducts.

Radio 3 *In Concert*; 14 Dec; 7.30pm

### 6 IN TUNE AT CHRISTMAS

A highpoint of Radio 3's Christmas festivities is *In Tune*, broadcast live from the BBC's 1932 Radio Theatre. Sean Rafferty welcomes the Temple Church Choir and Septura brass ensemble.

Radio 3; *In Tune*; 21 Dec; 4.30pm

### 7 CAROL COMPETITION

Could there be a famous carol in the making? The 2016 *Breakfast* competition entrants have composed a work using the medieval text 'Alleluia! A new work is come on hand!' and the winning carol will be revealed on 22 December.

Radio 3; *Breakfast*; 22 Dec; time tbc

### 8 CAROLS FROM KING'S

For many, Christmas begins with the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College, Cambridge. This year's service includes the premiere of a carol by Michael Berkeley, *This ender night*, alongside festive favourites by Mathias, Tavener and Howells.

BBC Two; *Carols from King's*; 24 Dec; tbc

### 9 CHRISTMAS EUCHARIST

As Christmas Day festivities get underway, it's the turn of Bristol Cathedral to host BBC One's live Eucharist service at 10am. Tune in for congregational carols from the city's two-towered landmark.

BBC One; *Christmas Day*; 25 Dec; 10am

### 10 MEDIEVAL CHRISTMAS

*The Early Music Show* explores our tradition of door-to-door carol singing, tracing its roots back to the Anglo-Saxon custom of 'wassailing' – translated as 'be in good health'.

Radio 3; *Early Music Late*; 25 Dec; 10.30pm

### 11 CHORAL EVENSONG

To celebrate its 90th anniversary, Radio 3's *Choral Evensong* is digging into the BBC vaults to revisit its finest moments. It also keeps us up to date, as the Rodolfus Choir leads a service at St Gabriel's Church, Pimlico.

Radio 3; *Choral Evensong*; 28 Dec; 3.30pm

### 12 LAST NIGHT OF THE PROMS

Recapture this year's Last Night, as Sakari Oramo conducts the BBC Symphony Orchestra, with guests including tenor Juan Diego Flórez.

Radio 3; *Prom 75 (rpt)*; 31 Dec; 9pm

1. The love of three o'Clock  
2. John Field  
3. Fountain, as heard in  
4. Mountains/A Night on  
5. The Chapel of King's  
6. Sir William  
7. Music for the Royal  
8. Let the right Seaphrim,  
9. Respighi's The Fountains  
10. We three Kings of Orient  
the Bare Mountain  
are (Three; Field; Fountain;  
Mountains; King's;  
Sepahrim),  
College, Cambridge  
Royal; Bright; O'reilly;  
Mountains; King's;  
Sepahrim),  
the Bare Mountain  
are (Three; Field; Fountain;  
Mountains; King's;  
Sepahrim),  
College, Cambridge  
Royal; Bright; O'reilly;

QUIZ ANSWERS from p98

# LIVE CHOICE

## 20 UNMISSABLE EVENTS FOR CHRISTMAS 2016

Our pick of the best Christmas concerts and operas, plus a guide to Rimsky-Korsakov's *Christmas Eve*



For detailed concert listings visit [www.classical-music.com/whats-on](http://www.classical-music.com/whats-on)



**MASS APPEAL:**  
Gothic Voices explore medieval masterpieces (Choice 1)

### 1 GOTHIC VOICES

Holkham Hall, Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, 3 Dec

Tel: +44 (0)1328 713111

Web: [www.gothicvoices.co.uk](http://www.gothicvoices.co.uk)

Ahead of performances at the Tower of London and York Early Music Christmas Festival, the vocal quartet unveils its new programme in Holkham's Marble Hall. 'Nowel Syng We Bothe Al and Som' explores the Annunciation and birth of Jesus in carols and motets, as well as festive Mass movements by late medieval composers John Dunstable and Leonel Power.

### 2 BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA & SINGERS

Saffron Hall, Saffron Walden, 3 Dec

Tel: 0845 548 7650 (UK only)

Web: [www.saffronhall.com](http://www.saffronhall.com)

'God bless us, every one!' After a performance at the Barbican on 2 Dec, where it's prefaced

by Rimsky-Korsakov's *Christmas Eve Suite* (see box p122), the BBC Symphony Orchestra and BBC Singers under conductor Martin André are Essex-bound with composer Neil Brand's take on Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. Seasonal family fare ensures that 'Bah, humbug!' is not an option.

### 3 JOHN ADAMS'S EL NIÑO

Barbican, London, 4 Dec

Tel: +44 (0)20 7638 8891

Web: [www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk)

The libretto of John Adams's 'Nativity Oratorio' *El Niño*, from 2000, is nothing if not exuberantly inclusive. It sources anything from the Benedictine composer Hildegard of Bingen to the father of the Reformation Martin Luther and Mexican poet Rosario Castellanos. Musically, Handel and contemporary pop are also in the frame. Adams himself conducts the London

**BAROQUE GIFTS:**  
Masaaki Suzuki directs festive JS Bach (Choice 7)

Symphony Orchestra and Chorus plus a fine cast led by soprano Joëlle Harvey.

### 4 THE SIXTEEN

St David's Hall, Cardiff, 4 Dec

Tel: +44 (0)29 2087 8444

Web: [www.stdavidshallcardiff.co.uk](http://www.stdavidshallcardiff.co.uk)

The Three Kings are the focus of The Sixteen's 2016 Christmas tour that stretches from Uppingham to Nottingham via London and Oxford. The choice of repertoire sees plainsong and traditional items woven around music by Palestrina, Lassus, Howells and Fricker. Conductor Harry Christophers ends with the eight-part Magnificat by Felice Anerio.

### 5 EX CATHEDRA

Town Hall, Birmingham, 4 Dec

Tel: +44 (0)121 780 3333

Web: [www.thsh.co.uk](http://www.thsh.co.uk)

Jeffrey Skidmore's Birmingham-based choir Ex Cathedra are performing over a dozen Christmas concerts, including an intriguing postscript to the Olympics. 'A Brazilian Christmas' showcases Ex Cathedra's Consort and Baroque Orchestra in music from the colonial town of Ouro Preto, including the haunting *Matinas de natal* by Castro Lobo.



## 6 YORK EARLY MUSIC CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL

York, 8-15 Dec

Tel: +44 (0)1904 658338

Web: [www.ncem.co.uk/xmas](http://www.ncem.co.uk/xmas)

Walmgate's medieval St Margaret's Church shoulders most of the concerts in a wide-ranging festive goodybag that briefly slips the Christmas leash, on 8 Dec, for a battlefield-inspired programme from Spiritato!. While Joglaresa and *a cappella* consort Renaissance send season's greetings, Magnificats by two generations of Bachs absorb the Yorkshire Bach Choir and Baroque Soloists.

## 7 MASAAKI SUZUKI

Cadogan Hall, London, 9 & 10 Dec

Tel: +44 (0)20 7730 4500

Web: [www.cadoganhall.com](http://www.cadoganhall.com)

Earlier this year, Masaaki Suzuki brought his Bach Collegium Japan to the Barbican for a Bach residency culminating in the Magnificat. Now he's back to continue the Christmas story with the *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248, that Bach lavished on Leipzig a decade after. The Choir and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment supply the musical heft – with *Singet dem Herrn* and the Sanctus from the B minor Mass amplifying the good cheer.

## 10 CHRISTMAS AT KINGS PLACE

Kings Place, London, 10-21 Dec

Tel: +44 (0)20 7520 1490

Web: [www.kingsplace.co.uk](http://www.kingsplace.co.uk)

Whether it's Simon Callow narrating Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* or choral rarities by Osiander and Hoyoul, Kings Place has Christmas all wrapped up. The Dunedin Consort dispenses Handel's *Messiah*, Oxford Baroque re-imagines the 1723 Christmas Day Vespers in St Thomas's Leipzig, while the new professional chamber choir Sonoro makes its Kings Place debut.

## 11 PSALMODY

St Mary's Church, Dedham, 11 Dec

Tel: +44 (0)1206 366603

Web: [www.suffolkvillagesfestival.com](http://www.suffolkvillagesfestival.com)  
Peter Holman reunites Suffolk Villages Festival stalwarts Psalmody and The John Jenkins Consort for Charpentier's festive *Messe de minuit pour Noël*. The second half journeys through 17th-century Germany and Spain before alighting in 19th-century Yorkshire for John Foster's choral and orchestral setting of *While shepherds watched their flocks by night*.

## 12 OPUS ANGLICANUM

Wells Cathedral, Somerset, 12 Dec

Tel: +44 (0)1749 672 773

Web: [www.wellscathedral.org.uk](http://www.wellscathedral.org.uk)

Opus Anglicanum has long specialised in marrying the spoken and the sung, and although it has commissioned works from the likes of Sally Beamish and Gabriel Jackson, the medieval repertoire retains a special place in its affections. Fifteenth-century English carols and liturgical music by Machaut, Josquin, Obrecht and Cornysh are threaded through a seasonal candlelit celebration.

## 13 TEMPLE WINTER FESTIVAL

Temple Church, London 12-19 Dec

Tel: +44 (0)20 7427 5641

Web: [www.templemusic.org](http://www.templemusic.org)

St John's Smith Square isn't the only Christmas Festival to sign off with Handel's *Messiah* (see Choice 8). After six concerts in Temple Church, spanning Finzi from the New London Orchestra and London Chorus to seasonal Bach and Messiaen from organist Greg Morris, the fourth Temple Winter Festival decamps to Middle Temple Hall for a final 'Hallelujah' by the Choir and Orchestra of Classical Opera under Ian Page.

## 14 ORCHESTRA OF OPERA NORTH

Town Hall, Huddersfield, 13 Dec

Tel: +44 (0)1484 225755

Web: [www.kirklees.gov.uk/townhalls](http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/townhalls)

For over 30 years, the conjunction of Raymond Briggs's whimsical tale and Howard Blake's score have made *The Snowman* a

## QUICK GUIDE TO...

## CHRISTMAS EVE

Rimsky-Korsakov

Five key facts about a work being performed this month (Choice 2)

'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE...: English National Opera's 1988 production of *Christmas Eve*

■ *Christmas Eve* is an opera in four acts, composed by Rimsky-Korsakov between 1894 and '95. The plot is based on a short story by Ukrainian writer Nikolai Gogol. Tchaikovsky's earlier work *Vakula the Smith* (1874) was based on the same source.

■ The story is set in a Ukrainian village and concerns a young blacksmith, Vakula (the son of witch Solokha), and his attempts to woo Oxana. To test his love, Oxana sets Vakula a task of fetching the Tsarina's boots from St Petersburg's Imperial Palace. He is helped by the Devil, who flies him there. On his Christmas Day return, Vakula discovers that Oxana would have loved him anyway, even without the boots, and they marry.

■ Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestration is enriched by Ukrainian folk references, including *koliadki* folk carols. The folk tune he uses for Oxana's aria in the last Act was also drawn on by Tchaikovsky for the finale of his Piano Concerto No. 1. For his portrayal of the stars, the composer uses harp and celesta and emphasises the Devil's scenes with intervals of augmented fourths.

■ Rimsky-Korsakov had the story in mind for an opera for some time but held off out of respect for Tchaikovsky. It was only after the latter's death in 1893 that he felt that Gogol's story was once again fair game. He composed the libretto in April 1894, following the text of Gogol but adding 'numerous new things... in its fantastic parts'.

■ The premiere took place at the Mariinsky Theatre in 1895, with soprano Yevgeniya Mravina singing Oxana. The Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich caused a commotion at the rehearsal, demanding that the singer playing the Tsarina was too similar to his great-grandmother, Catherine II, and should be replaced. The composer obliged, but boycotted the premiere.

Christmas must-see. Conductor Hugh Brunt compounds the storytelling, prefacing an accompanied screening with Paul Patterson's Roald Dahl-indebted *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Three Little Pigs*. John Savournin narrates.

*Vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jésus*, the epic cycle Messiaen composed in World War II.

## 18 THE KING'S CONSORT

Wigmore Hall, London, 19 Dec

Tel: +44 (0)20 7935 2141

Web: [www.wigmore-hall.org.uk](http://www.wigmore-hall.org.uk)

Neatly complementing Masaaki Suzuki's Bach *Christmas Oratorio* (see Choice 7), The King's Consort turns the clock back three quarters of a century for Heinrich Schütz's *The Christmas Story* – lent a Venetian context with preceding works by Guami, Gussago and the Gabrieli. Tenor Benjamin Hulett is the Evangelist, soprano Julia Doyle is the Angel and baritone David Wilson-Johnson sings the role of Herod.

## 19 TALLIS SCHOLARS

Howard Assembly Room, Leeds, 20 Dec

Tel 0844 848 2720 (UK only)

Web: [www.operanorth.co.uk](http://www.operanorth.co.uk)

The Tallis Scholars throw themselves into the Christmas season with four concerts built around Cipriano de Rore's *Missa Praeter rerum seriem* and motet *Hodie Christus natus est*. There's music too by Josquin, Victoria and Taverner; and Old World meets New in Hernando Franco's setting of the *Salve Regina*.

## 20 MANCHESTER CAMERATA

Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, 1 Jan

Tel: +44 (0)161 907 9000

Web: [www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk](http://www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk)

Having embraced Jimi Hendrix to launch the season, Manchester Camerata's music director Gábor Takács-Nagy returns to head a New Year's Day Viennese Gala with a twist. Favourite arias by Johann Strauss II and Lehár feature soprano Ailish Tynan, while violinist Adi Brett is the soloist in Vaughan Williams's un-Viennese *The Lark Ascending*.

## 16 JOGLARESA

Bridges Centre, Monmouth, 17 Dec

Tel: +44 (0)1291 330020

Web: [www.wyevalleymusic.org.uk](http://www.wyevalleymusic.org.uk)

'Caroles of Nunnes and Roses' is the title of the new Yuletide programme from Belinda Sykes's intrepid band of medievalists. Drawing on accompaniment from bagpipes, fidel, harp, dulcimer, gittern and percussion, the five voices delve into a rich world of nowells, chants and wassails (including a Christmas lullaby from a 15th-century manuscript assembled for the nuns of St Mary's Chester).

## 17 REINIS ZARINS

St George's Bristol, 19 Dec

Tel: +44 (0)845 4024 001

Web: [www.stgeorgesbris托.co.uk](http://www.stgeorgesbris托.co.uk)

Before its final festive heave-ho, Bristol's church-turned-concert-hall takes an elevated pause as Latvian pianist Reinis Zarinš tackles



MESSIAEN MEDITATION:  
pianist Reinis Zarinš regards the  
nativity in Bristol (Choice 17)

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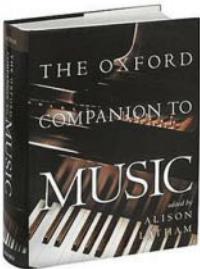


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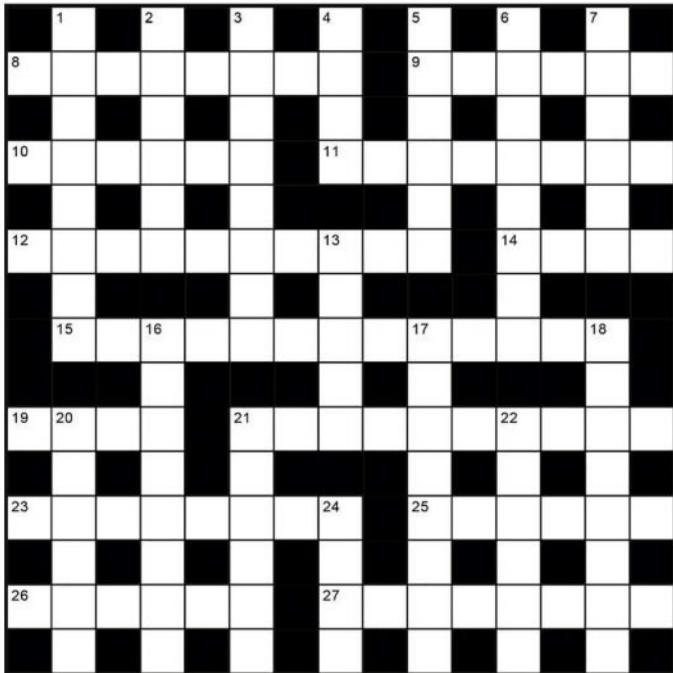
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# Christmas prize crossword No. 302

The first correct solution of our monthly crossword to be picked at random will win a copy of *The Oxford Companion to Music* worth £40 (available at bookstores or [www.oup.co.uk](http://www.oup.co.uk)). Send your answers to: BBC Music Magazine, Crossword 302, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA to arrive by 22 December 2016 (solution in our March 2017 issue). Crossword set by Paul Henderson



Your name & address .....

## ACROSS

- 8 British organist spoils auditorium (8)
- 9 Dramatic works in theatres are possibly recalled (6)
- 10 Percussion instrument to spoil a cantata heartlessly (6)
- 11 Lute playing I had during the old season (8)
- 12 Seasonal performer who prompts a memory? (4-6)
- 14 Unemployed soprano to avoid sneak (4)
- 15 Last of trickery I displayed in a new anagram, possibly showing seasonal song (4,2,1,6)
- 19 Some choral ambition in Tavener subject? (4)
- 21 It appears in four Mozart concertos? Cor! (6,4)
- 23 Plays record, holding off commercial extras (4-4)
- 25 Add wind to some quintet – a real regressing (6)
- 26 Start meal, with alto tucking in (6)
- 27 Popular singer initially with unusual pride showing off many ideas (8)

## DOWN

- 1 Hard time involving a bar in Spanish dance (8)
- 2 A Shakespearean King's turning up in Czech symphony (6)
- 3 Devilish violinist in Italy following atheist (8)
- 4 Perform song with piano taking lead? (4)
- 5 Swiss performer, say, to perform in bank after upset (6)
- 6 Focusing small amount of American money on Wagner operas (8)
- 7 English composer ultimately to manage, we hear (6)

- 13 Slow piece finally ending wild party (5)
- 16 Italian composer: England playing host to new one (8)
- 17 Recomposition of march is a recollection of former style (8)
- 18 Uncommon pieces? Tries fooling around with air (8)
- 20 Take the stage, getting attention after a couple of pianos (6)
- 21 Intervals I excluded from this after one's come in very loud (6)
- 22 Britten character: her intent is picked up (6)
- 24 Place including piano or identical copy (4)

## OCTOBER SOLUTION NO. 299



## OCTOBER WINNER

Dr M Steward, Middlesex

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## THE MUSIC QUIZ

*It's time to get festive with this month's quiz...*

1. Which fruity opera by Prokofiev was premiered at the Auditorium Theatre, Chicago on 30 December, 1921?
2. Born in Dublin in 1782, which Irish composer and virtuoso pianist is regularly credited with having invented the nocturne?
3. The Valle Giulia (at Dawn), Triton (in the Morning), Trevi (at Noon) and Villa Medici (at Sunset) are all examples of what, as visited in a famous symphonic poem from 1917?
4. Orchestrated by Rimsky-Korsakov after its original composer's death, which 1867 'musical picture' depicts a spooky witches' Sabbath that takes place on St John's Eve (23 June)?

## PICTURE THIS

5. This magnificent building has a strong Christmas connection. What is it?



6. Name the film whose soundtrack won composer John Williams the Oscar for Best Original Score at the 1978 Academy Awards.

7. Commissioned by King George II to celebrate the end of the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48), name the sparkly work performed for the first time in London's Green Park in April 1749.

8. Which soprano aria from Handel's 1743 oratorio *Samson* was sung by Kiri Te Kanawa at the marriage of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer in July 1981?

9. Which football team is supported avidly by cellist Julian Lloyd Webber and, slightly less keenly, by his brother Andrew?

10. Taking one word from each one, which well-known Christmas carol links the previous nine answers?

*See p93 for answers*

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*Gerald Larner* explains how Debussy took exception to being called an 'Impressionist'

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# Jamie Barton *mezzo-soprano*

I come from an extremely musical family – I grew up in the north-west Georgia mountains, and several of my family played bluegrass instruments. My dad started my music recognition education from a very early age with **THE BEATLES**. One of their songs would come on the radio, and he would ask me what it was, and which album it came from. I was really in love with the *White Album* and jovial songs on it such as 'Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da'.

I started playing the piano at about nine years old, and at around 14 I discovered **CHOPIN**. The piece that really made me fall in love with classical music was his Nocturne No. 21. I remember asking for Chopin CDs for Christmas, and got one called *Chopin and Champagne*. Hilarious as the title is, most of the recordings on it were by Claudio Arrau, and I remember listening to Nocturne No. 21 again and again. There are so many pieces by Chopin I'd love to be able to play, such as his F major Ballade.

I sang in a choir and musical theatre shows at high school, but in terms of solo singing it was only at Shorter College that I decided I wanted to go into vocal performance. A couple of months into my second year, I was awarded a place in a competition, which I won. For the competition I sang **BRAHMS**'s 'Von ewiger Liebe', which I still have a massive affection for – you get to live through three characters as you sing it, and it's beautifully structured.

After Shorter, I went to Indiana University where, in my third year, my teacher insisted that I enter the Metropolitan Opera and Houston Grand Opera competitions and that I also apply for the mezzo Marilyn Horne's masterclasses at Carnegie Hall. It went well, as I won the Met competition, came third in Houston, and Marilyn offered me the opening slot in her recital series for the following year! Marilyn is a wonderful teacher – she's formidable and scary, yes, but in a good way. The first time we worked together, I sang 'Urlicht' from Mahler's Second Symphony and it was an intense, emotional experience. Since then, I've taken all of my bel canto roles to her. It was also in my masterclass with her that I heard others singing songs by **DUPARC**, and I thought 'What beautiful music!'. I bought



**RING APPEAL:**  
'All of a sudden,  
here was Wagner!'

JAMIE BARTON WAS BORN in Georgia, US. Following studies at Shorter College in her home town of Rome and then at Indiana University, she began her career at Houston Grand Opera. In 2013, Barton won both the Song Prize and the Main Prize at BBC Cardiff Singer of the World, leading to major engagements worldwide. In 2017, she sings in Verdi's *Nabucco* and Dvořák's *Rusalka* at the New York Metropolitan Opera, to be shown live in cinemas across the UK on 7 January and 25 February respectively.

likewise in 2011. And then in 2013 I did get in, and it turned out to be my year. As so much of what I do and love is art song, I sang the middle song from Elgar's *Sea Pictures* in the first heat and Sibelius's 'Var det en dröm?' in the final – many singers, in contrast, choose to do opera arias in the rounds with orchestra.

Going into the competition, I didn't have a very full engagement diary at all, but Cardiff changed that completely. Now, the trick is to not overschedule myself, which is a lovely thing to have to manage. One engagement that did come as a result of Cardiff was singing last spring in Verdi's *Nabucco* at Covent Garden... with Plácido Domingo as my dad. That was one of those moments when I thought 'How has this happened to a girl from Rome, Georgia?'! ■

*Interview by Jeremy Pound*

## JAMIE BARTON MUSIC CHOICE

**The Beatles**  
**The Beatles**  
**(The White Album)**  
EMI



**Chopin Nocturne No. 21**  
Claudio Arrau (piano)  
Philips 446 6292



**Brahms**  
**Von ewiger Liebe**  
Marilyn Horne (mezzo),  
Martin Katz (piano)  
Sony 2564 67714-0



**Duparc Songs**  
Sarah Walker (mezzo),  
Thomas Allen (baritone),  
Roger Vignoles (piano)  
Hyperion CDA66323



**Wagner Ring Cycle**  
Various soloists; Bayreuth  
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